Special Thematic Section on "Rethinking Prefigurative Politics"

(Im)Possible Conversations? Activism, Childhood and Everyday Life

Sevasti-Melissa Nolas*[a], Christos Varvantakis[a], Vinnarasan Aruldoss[a]

[a] Department of Social Work and Social Care, School of Education and Social Work, University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom.

Abstract

The paper offers an analytical exploration and points of connection between the categories of activism, childhood and everyday life. We are concerned with the lived experiences of activism and childhood broadly defined and especially with the ways in which people become aware, access, orient themselves to, and act on issues of common concern; in other words what connects people to activism. The paper engages with childhood in particular because childhood remains resolutely excluded from practices of public life and because engaging with activism from the marginalized position of children's everyday lives provides an opportunity to think about the everyday, lived experiences of activism. Occupying a space 'before method', the paper engages with autobiographical narratives of growing up in the Communist left in the USA and the historical events of occupying Greek schools in the 1990s. These recounted experiences offer an opportunity to disrupt powerful categories currently in circulation for thinking about activism and childhood. Based on the analysis it is argued that future research on the intersections of activism, childhood and everyday life would benefit from exploring the spatial and temporal dimension of activism, to make visible the unfolding biographical projects of activists and movements alike, while also engaging with the emotional configurations of activists' lives and what matters to activists, children and adults alike.

Keywords: activism, childhood, prefiguration, everyday life, communism, United States of America, schools, occupations, Greece, cross-cultural perspectives

The paper offers an analytical exploration and points of connection between the categories of activism, childhood and everyday life. We are concerned with the lived experiences of activism and childhood broadly defined and especially with the ways in which people become aware, access, orient themselves to, and act on issues of common concern. The institutionalization of many social movements means the experiential side of what connects people to activism has been sidelined in the social movements literature (Mizen, 2015). Meanwhile the category of childhood remains resolutely excluded from practices of public life.[i] In this paper we engage with these marginalized positions arguing for the value of understanding activism through the lens of children's everyday lives.

Our analysis occupies what sociologist Saskia Sassen (2014) describes as a space 'before method'. The space before method represents the creative, yet often invisible, conceptual work that needs to be undertaken in any research project before 'the disciplining of social science methods'. The space before method is more than a literature review. Sassen uses strong, emotive language to describe the intellectual labour of engaging with categories and subjecting them to critical examination before empirical work begins. Sassen's argument is that powerful categories are an invitation not to think ('mental violence'). Her response to this is one of 'epistemic indignation' followed by entering a process of unlearning the categories in order to explore what is being left unsaid. 'Before method' asks questions about what powerful categories make visible and what remains in the shadows.

Epistemologically the space before method is a 'zone' of creativity enabling researchers to find their feet in relation to an object of study. 'Before method' is a tactical practice for creatively inventing new ways of knowing by subverting and overturning more powerful strategies of knowledge production (e.g. professionalised knowledge). There is a pluralism of ontology and epistemology at the core of 'before method' which resonates with Sassen's own biography and lived experience of growing up across cultures, and it is this pluralism that is held up as a challenge to authoritative explanations.

Our own research was primarily motivated by an epistemic indignation towards the category of 'children's participation'. The category tends to relate far more to youth and young adulthood ignoring the experiences of younger children, while across the lifespan calls for 'participation' often amount to a form of governance of public services, programmes and projects that bear little resemblance to political experiences in everyday life (cf. Nolas, 2015). Repeated calls to re-think children's participation have failed to engage with national and international political landscapes and political traditions, preferring instead to conceptually tweak existing discourses. In this paper, we make a first move toward re-thinking children's participation by looking at children's experiences of prefiguration. We focus on prefiguration (Yates, 2015) because it proves a durable activist category across time (Jeffrey & Dyson, 2015), and because it is enjoying something of resurgence in current contested political times becoming once again a key category for thinking about activism. Prefiguration also provides something of a challenge to contemporary liberal human rights discourses of children's participation which dare not to think of the 'political child' (Webb, 2015).

Activism: The Case of Prefiguration

Defining activism in general and prefiguration in particular is acknowledged to be tricky. Social movements have been described as creative 'collective entreprises' held together by 'family resemblances' dissatisfied with the status quo and seeking to establish new forms of living (Crossley, 2002). As a specific form of collective enterprise, shared beliefs, and solidarity, prefiguration focuses on the processual dimensions of everyday activist activities and refers specifically 'to the attempted construction of alternative or utopian social relations in the present, either in parallel with, or in the course of, adversarial social movement protest' (Yates, 2015).

Emerging out of radical left and anarchist politics, especially in the United States, prefiguration was positioned as a 'direct attack on statist Marxism' (Boggs, 1977, as cited in Yates, 2015) and described as 'the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal' (Boggs, 1978, p. 2). The focus on the microelements of political activity and the transformation of everyday life provides the practice of prefiguration with historical continuity (Jeffrey & Dyson, 2015). In particular, Yates (2015) describes a classical definition of prefiguration as being concerned with anticipation (*prolepsis)* of a different future and as such, focused on building alternatives to the status

quo while also carrying out performative protest (e.g. occupying public spaces). Drawing on his own research on social centres in Barcelona, he also puts forward a contemporary definition that regards prefiguration as going beyond imagining and experimenting with alternative ways of living and organizing, and trying to consolidate and diffuse these alternatives beyond a specific community.

Our interest in this paper is the future-orientation of prefiguration and the experiences of hope upon which such an orientation depends (Calhoun, 2013). Hope is a key trope of revolutionary narratives (Freire, 1994) that express a desire for a better way of being or of living (Levitas, 2010). It is no coincidence that prefigurative politics have come to the fore at a time when economic and political life is in a state of crisis (Bauman & Bordoni, 2014). Yet, juxtaposing hope with crisis and despair creates polarized, absolute categories that miss 'the range of meanings and partial truths that lie [in-] between' (Haaken, 1998, p. 4). As argued elsewhere (Nolas, 2014), an epistemological approach that focuses on everyday practices and experiences is necessary in order to understand the spaces between intentions and actualities, so often obscured by the stories that movements tell themselves over time (Haaken, 2010). Approaching politics as a messy collection of personal, affective and intimate practices located in people's everyday lives, experiences and encounters, provides fertile ground for unthinking familiar categories (Ahmed, 2010; Butler, 2014; Dave, 2012; Haaken, 2010; Roseneil, 2000; Segal, 2007). At the same time, engaging with children's perspectives affords further epistemological openness. Children are born into their parents' ideological-political worlds instead of choosing them themselves, and as such may be less defensive in their accounts of what it means to be an activist (Weesjes, 2010). At the same time, while children may not fully understand the semantics and implications of political tussles, they are very much attuned to the emotional dynamics of 'something happening' (Rodgers, 2005).

The everyday experiences of activism and childhood are brought together in this paper through an exploration of autobiographical narratives (Andrews, 2007). These recollections provide an opportunity to challenge official movement histories (McLeod & Thomson, 2009; Weesjes, 2010) and hold analytical traction for moving beyond activism's 'spectacular moments' (Dave, 2012). At the same time, and of equal importance, by following children's own concerns longitudinally, an exploration of their experiences of the political becomes possible. In so doing an opportunity emerges for reimagining activism and childhood alike.

In the next sections, we turn to two historical examples of prefiguration told from the perspective of childhood in order to tease out the connections between activism and childhood.

Growing up in the Communist Left in the United States, 1920-1960

The first example examines experiences of growing up in communist families in various parts of the US from the 1920s until the early 1960s. The analysis draws on a compilation of short autobiographical essays written by adults, 'red diaper babies', and compiled into an anthology by Judi Kaplan and Linn Shapiro (1998). The editors, and many of the contributors, self-identify as 'red diaper babies' and describe themselves in generational terms (e.g. 'second generation red diaper baby'). The term 'generation' communicates a socio-cultural and political identity and epochal belonging (Alanen, 2001) that enables the recognition of these autobiographies as forming part of a 'collective entreprise' held together by 'family resemblances', then and now.

Founded in 1919, the Communist Party USA has a long and complex history intricately intertwined with the history of US labour movement and the international communist movement. Heterogeneous in political orientation, party membership included left and far left political positions, including both statist and pragmatist fractions, as well as anarchist and radical leftists associated with democratic struggles for social justice and equality. Many of the accounts in Kaplan's and Shapiro's (1998) anthology demonstrate the often direct involvement of communist party members with social issues later taken up by the Civil Rights movement such as racial segregation in the South, trade unionism, the peace movement and the women's movement. The Depression era of the 1920s has been described as the 'heyday of American communism' (Harvey, 1984) and many of the biographical accounts from this period attest to a vibrant and dynamic movement galvanizing around issues of labour, justice and equality. Histories of the USA Communist Party told through its major conventions (Marxism.org) reveals a complex cultural and demographic membership including immigrants from the Ukraine, the Baltic States, Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, and the Jewish diaspora; many of these voices and immigrant experiences also emerge in the autobiographical writing reviewed for this paper.

Rodgers (2005), using the same and other source materials, has written about children's roles in social movements. Her analysis results in a tri-partite framework of children as strategic participants, participants by default, and active participants. Our own reading of the biographies compiled in Kaplan's and Shapiro's (1998) anthology concurs with this framework while also suggesting a more dynamic understanding of children's participation that varied across time and space. The autobiographies often start with stories of being 'participants by default' before describing active participation at the same or later points of time. The narratives also recount the activities involved and the spaces in which activism takes place. These activities included being present at important events as well as performing the most mundane, yet necessary, tasks that served to sustain the movement such as stuffing envelopes and cleaning floors of a local movement chapter. The location of some gatherings, in kitchens and sitting rooms, is also revealing suggesting a certain domesticity in activist practices that gets lost in the narratives about activisms' 'spectacular moments' (Dave, 2012). It is also interesting to note the rich cultural tapestry of literature, poetry and music that is an important conduit for creating political culture and communicating a movement's experiences and ideals: 'our movement was a singing movement… we all sang together' (Frantz, 1998, p. 52).

Exploring Contradictions

Our own exploration of these autobiographies that extends the typology initiated by Rodgers (2005) was prompted by the rich, emotional language used in the authors' recollections of 'growing up red'. The visceral language used by contributors takes us beyond children's roles in 'the' movement and offers a glimpse into the lived experiences of creating a movement. For example, Frantz (1998), whose account is especially rich in affective language, talks about the 'close and intense and joyful and soul-satisfying camaraderie that accompanies continuous and committed political activity' and 'our community needed to be very tight, and it was, woven with care and concern and love' (p. 50).

Our own reading of the autobiographies left us with an appreciation of the diversity of activists' experiences. Some of the descriptions of activism in the biographies conform to Bogg's classical definition of prefiguration cited earlier, while others do not. For instance, Frantz (1998) once again, recalls: 'We cared about the quality of human beings in the movement, ourselves and each other…were you an example of the socialist men or women we wanted to become? Unselfish, respectful of others, with the common good paramount' (p. 50). Other experiences were more contradictory. Lawson (1998), son of the successful Hollywood screenwriter and communist John

Howard Lawson, recounts an affluent and well-connected childhood and a community 'politically in favour of sharing the wealth, spreading the largess, helping the underdog, the working people, the poor' (p. 59); while Ware (1998) in her fictionalized account of being a 'red diaper daughter' describes the tensions between a father's structural approach to radical social change and a daughter's pragmatist-humanist focus on the small, everyday gestures that might make a meaningful impact on a single life.

Some authors recalled noting these contradictions at the time, between their parents' political ideals and parental lifestyles and practice: 'When my mother, standing in the fancy kitchen of our big new house on Philadelphia's Main Line in 1959, said, "Comes the revolution," I could only think, "Comes the revolution, you won't get to keep this house." I was too much of a "good girl" to say that, however' (Robbins, 1998, p. 106). Others, like Lawson (1998), don't remember experiencing a tension: 'As a child I saw no contradiction between being a capitalist-hating radical and achieving a level of wealth and accomplishment working the "moom pitcha" business. Why not?' (p. 55).

The contradictions more acutely experienced by the authors growing up were those within their own families and those between their family's ideology/ies and the values and politics of extended families, the community and, most notably, school. Hunter's (1998) story is especially telling regarding ideological contradictions within the family, and the tensions she experienced are echoed in other narratives in the collection. She describes her childhood as a 'seesaw' between her father's commitment to Marxist theory of class struggle and her mother's observance of her Jewish faith. In this way Hunter (1998) describes her sense of self emerging through 'the on-going battle between two protagonists: Papa, the Red Doubter, and Mama, the Protector Against Sins. Both were fiercely determined to leave their imprint on our development and as a result often left our young lives in disarray' (p. 29).

Kaplan's (1998, p. 41-44) story is also especially poignant in this regard and describes the tensions experienced between her family, community and school life. In 1931 at the age of 10 her father announced the family would move to Birobidjan, a Jewish Autonomous Oblast (district) on the far eastern Russian border. The family spent two years in Russia, where Kaplan, picking up Russian much faster than her parents, took on the important role of language broker. Kaplan's story from the first sentence reads like an adventure story, a rite of passage tale into the communist movement; and in the third paragraph from the end of her story she describes it as such: 'my Russian adventure'. However, the family's return to the US brought with it a duality. 'I lived two lives,' she recounts, describing her fear of being ostracized and her refusal to speak or acknowledge that she understood Russian for many years. In school she tried to be like the other kids, at her youth group she was accepted and admired for her Russian experience. Others responded to threats of ostracization differently. For instance, a number of the contributors to the anthology were the children of European Jewish émigrés and used their political identity to rebel against their ethnic and religious roots. Carlson (1998) writes that 'being young revolutionaries, we defied many accepted practices. In an all-Jewish neighbourhood, we Pioneers would be the only ones who'd go to school on important Jewish holidays' (p. 21).

The authors evaluate their experiences of growing up in the communist left in the US in different ways. For some, like Frantz (1998), who sustained a politically active life, the experience was 'character' building, nurturing, and life affirming. For others, like Lawson (1998), the experience was emotionally scarring: 'I became disillusioned; I was lost for a long time. I had to try to get rid of the failed dogmatism of the communist movement I had been raised in and slowly, laboriously find other values that made more sense to me' (p. 60). Many of the contributors

reflect their naïveté of progressive social change as well as the oppressive constraints of dogmatic ideology. At the same time, many of the accounts retain the hopefulness of having taken part, and in some cases continuing to do so: 'our worldview was simplistic beyond belief… the pain of disillusion is profound… [yet] I would not trade the passion for social and radical justice that I inherited from my father for any other way of life' (Frantz, 1998, p. 53). It is to that hopefulness of prefiguration that we turn to next as it was experienced in a different historical time and cultural context in Greece in the 1990s when children occupied their schools.

Occupying Schools in Greece, 1990s

"We gathered a few desks, chairs, we blocked the door, in fact we set up a barricade and we controlled who was coming and going; in no time somebody made a banner with the word 'occupation' on it and that was it! Within the day we have already had a first assembly, with the participation of almost every student, we had arranged working teams (cleaning, organization etc.), everything in an unimaginable pace and with an unimaginable drive. Within 24 hours the occupation was absolutely functioning on a twenty-four hour basis and the best? – we didn't have a clear hierarchy, we judged it was unnecessary. I'm talking about such anarchic-autonomous situations and I repeat, this crazy model generally lasted for 52 days. (…) [W]e should be keeping people from out of the school out, we should be careful not to do any damages (we were wise enough to know that damages would do harm in a communicational level), let alone that the nights were also fun: We were listening to our music, we were hanging out – I shouldn't lie, it was exhausting, but we had great fun too! (…) [P]ersonally and for the majority of us, we didn't give a shit whether we would overthrow Mistotakis (the conservative PM) or whether PASOK (a center party) would return or whether we would bring socialism. All these were non-sense and we at least knew that while all these were happening (…)" (N.K., 2013)[ii]

In this section we hone into a case in which younger people themselves engaged and experimented with prefiguration. The example comes from the practice of school occupations in Greece in the 1990s. School occupations have been widely employed by students in Greece over the past 40 years as a way of protesting against educational reforms. Indeed, since the formation of the Greek state in the mid-1800s, 'education', as a policy, institution, and lived experience, has played a central role in shaping domestic protest and political struggles (Psacharopoulos & Kazamias, 1980; Rigos, 2007). For example, the first big student revolt took place in 1859, and subsequent protests unfolded against imperialistic/colonial European politics (Rigos, 2007). The uprising against the military junta (1967-1974) in November 1973, which eventually led to its downfall, started as a protest by university students and the occupation of their university buildings. The protest practice of school occupations re-emerged a few times in the eighties before reaching a peak in 1990/1991 (Giovanopoulos & Dalakoglou, 2011).

The school occupations of 1990/1991 took place in protest against an education reform bill proposed by the then Conservative Minister of Education seeking amongst other things to reintroduce school uniforms, to monitor student behaviour outside of school, and one-off exams for entry into the upper secondary school. The school occupations resulted in the lock down of most lower (*gymnasio*) and upper (*lykeio*) secondary schools in Greece for a period of three months from November 1990 (Giovanopoulos & Dalakoglou, 2011; Ios, 2006; Karamichas, 2009). The minister eventually resigned and the bill was withdrawn. The events of the 1990/1991 established a practice of protest occupation that continues to be reproduced today (Giovanopoulos & Dalakoglou, 2011; Karamichas, 2009; Pechtelidis, 2013). The opening quote provides an example of how those 1990/1991 occupations were experienced

by one participant. We draw on it for illustrative purpose while also developing our analysis from other source material.

Exploring Liminal Spaces

The example of a practice in which students barricade themselves and create protest communities in their schools, is a fertile ground for a discussion of younger people's involvement in their own prefiguration. A school occupation challenges and transforms the school, an institution connected in many ways with authority and power. As Pechtelidis (2013) puts it, 'schools' built environments, embody particular values and hierarchies, and attempt to ideologically discipline youth bodies; however, forms of political action such as school occupations challenge precisely this form of discipline' (p. 28). In so doing, a place and time is created wherein younger people can experiment with organizing an educational space, and their everyday lived experience, differently. Prefigurative qualitites underpin the student engagement and participation in the transformation of their educational space. Graeber (2002) has underlined how the experience of participation in such communities and direct democratic processes, is an intense life-changing experience that can profoundly transform one's 'whole sense of human possibilities' (p. 72). As Graeber (2002) puts it: 'It's one thing to say, 'Another world is possible'. It's another to experience it, however momentarily' (p. 72).

The role played by school occupations in enabling younger people to develop their politics has been obscured by generational discourses that position young people as apolitical on the one hand and troublemakers on the other (cf. Pechtelidis, 2013). Yet the practice of school occupations, as is for instance illustrated via N.K.'s narrative, underline an instance of young people's disconnection with both mainstream politics as well as with established models of protest. Historically, as Giovanopoulos and Dalakoglou (2011) note, the movement of 1990/1991, which was the first one to act against the newly formed neo-liberal regime, was the first *not* to be patronized by existing political parties – it coincided with the dissolution of the communist youth party, who had, up until then, been central in students' struggles.

Disconnected from mainstream politics and ideologies, the transformed space allowed for open and non-politically biased assemblies and discussions among the participants – discussions that were deeply political and which impacted significantly on participants' everyday lives. The process of a school occupation, which usually involves students barricading themselves within the school (a public building), is run by students' general assemblies who decide collectively and via direct-democratic processes, about the politics and the practicalities of the protest they are undertaking. Thus, the absence of mainstream ideologies in the decision-making processes, does not constitute an absence of the political. Instead, and as Graeber (2002) has duly noted about 'new' social movements since the 2000s, their very organization (i.e. direct-democratic processes of decision making) *becomes* their ideology.

The significance of these protests, and of the experience of participation therein, is manifold. Although, as previously mentioned, these protests have had an effect on policymaking, a fair evaluation might also consider the consequences of participation on participants' political consciousness *and* in challenging social norms. The lived experience of confronting and negotiating with adult authorities by the school's gates – encounters with the teachers, with those parents opposing the occupation, the police, the mass media and the state – have left a mark on the cultural narratives and public imagination of a generation of youth. The occupation of a school by its own students, and the face-to-face challenging of social norms, is nothing less than a socially transgressive act that forcefully addresses some of the most well established normalities of adult-constructed worlds and adult-child relationships. A society's conservative reflexes are activated in the face of a de-facto 'other', *children* in this case, who criticise

and take radical action against what this society has designed for them (cf. Pechtelidis, 2013). In this sense, participation in school occupations prescribes a radical activism by a radical other involving the confrontation of adult authority and the challenge to adult assumptions about children's competence to make decisions about issues that concern them.

These layered set of encounters with adult authorities, as well as the necessity to succeed and maintain sustainable levels of communal cohesion and of material sufficiency, necessitates a dynamic of action often excluded from common sense understandings of childhood and youth. The example of school occupations in Greece provides evidence to the opposite. Participation in such a DIY protests, what Karamichas (2009) notes as a rite of passage for Greek youth, occurs indeed in the liminal space of a building for education that is nevertheless de-signified of its 'school' status and in which the established set of hierarchies (teachers, principals) are suspended. Indeed, it appears that participation in a school occupation, signifies also the creation of a sort of *communitas* (Turner, 1969) – a temporary and transient publics galvanized by shared experiences in a liminal space (cf. Turner, 2012). These rite-of-passage experiences of participation in a counter-structured space, similar to what Graeber (2002) describes as 'ests', do not leave their participants unchanged regarding the full range of possibilities for human and societal organization.

A Framing for an (Im)possible Conversation?

Exploring activists' lives through recollections of their childhoods highlights continuities and changes in activism, activist orientations and the processes of connecting to activism. In this final section we explore the themes that have emerged from engaging with historical examples of prefiguration and personal autobiography as these relate to articulating the lived experiences of activism on the one hand and the connections between childhood and public life on the other. The themes have emerged through a process of reading across our two examples. This process was followed by a conversation between these emergent themes and research on activism and childhood in the Global South to further challenge and expand categories that are strongly anchored to the histories of the Global North. In this final section we broaden our perspective and draw on research of activism from across the lifespan.

Emergent Selves, Emergent Activisms

Yates (2015) has noted that narratives from social movement participants tend to downplay cultural and identification processes even as such processes are central in bringing activists together. Yates suggests that activists employ a 'discursive hierarchy' in which 'the political' is favoured. The analysis presented above favours an approach to understanding activists' journeys through projects of self even if activists themselves downplay their identities. As Andrews (1991) argues 'an appreciation of the intersection between historical context and personal circumstance' is necessary to understand journeys towards, with and through activism.

Approaching activism and prefiguration from the radical otherness of childhood made the dynamic biographical projects of both activists and movements more visible. As an example of this, Lawson's (1998) comment about his personality (sic) stemming 'as much, or more, from my parents being the children of immigrants as from their being Reds' (p. 57), resonates across the anthology. It also points to the contradictions and tensions that shape many of these personal and movement projects, and the processes of making sense of, working through and

emerging out of old contradictions and tensions into new. The Communist autobiographies are replete with examples of such journeys as participants try to untangle the enmeshment of politics, society, culture and their own family history, gender experiences and contributions to the movement.

Contradictions and tensions also hold true in contemporary experiences of activism with participants describing experiences of 'constant deliberation' (Mizen, 2015) and ambivalence about their activism, its goals and processes. At the same time, it is interesting to note the diachronic differences between the biographies we looked at and contemporary analyses of prefiguration. The stories of movement participation and prefiguration analysed here were reflexive and highlight tensions but cannot be described as ambivalent. The contradictions are resolved in most of the narratives through participants' commitment to a lifetime of radical and progressive social change. Commitment and concern too are recurring themes (is this just? am I putting the common good ahead of myself?). Indeed, as Andrews (1991) notes of British socialist activists she interviewed, 'these lifetime socialist activists have experienced relatively little inner conflict regarding major decisions they have made or actions they have performed in their lives' (p. 194). While this may be a product of the complexity of temporal relations and of the narrative dynamics of looking back (McLeod & Thomson, 2009), it highlights changes in activist practices across time with certainty and conviction giving way to a more problematizing stance.

Meanwhile, records of occupying schools in Greece in the 1990s are less vocal about the dynamic and diverse biographical projects involved. The cross-cultural approach taken here allows us to question these silences. As Giovanopoulos and Dalakoglou (2011) argue, Greek public discourses of youth protests and school occupations tell a homogenizing narrative of youth identity ignoring the ethnic and, we would add, gender diversities of young people on the streets and in occupied school buildings. The emblematic narrative we drew on here also says little about the multiple, overlapping and dynamic biographical projects involved at the intersections of activism, childhood and everyday life. The absence of public and critical reflection on these intersections conforms to a specific dominant nineteenth century narrative of the nation state that falls short of capturing the lived experiences of changing demographics, gender roles and global mobilities. Regarding activism and childhood, or indeed activism across the lifespan, it is important to attend to the rich tapestry of overlaid narratives of self as those unfold in time and across it, and from which a political self, with all its inter-sectionalities, emerges.

These dynamics should also alert us to the possibilities and limitations of prefiguration across national-cultural boundaries. Ethnographic research on activism and prefiguration in India (Dave, 2012; Jeffrey & Dyson, 2014; Jeffrey & Young, 2012) has begun to think about prefiguration in the Global South where diverse affiliations and identifications mean that it is not always possible to maintain prefigurative practices across social spaces (e.g. university, family, community). It is important moving forward that analyses of activism pay close attention to the cultural and historical period in which they are situated to avoid what post-colonial scholars describe as epistemic violence (Spivak, 1988, as cited in Biekart & Fowler, 2013), the undermining and eradication of knowledge and practices that are not in line with prevailing Western, liberal and radical beliefs.

Connecting Activism and Childhood

Research on activists' biographies (Andrews, 1991, p. 113) suggest that orientations and commitment to activism emerge through a combination of contact with key individuals, both known, like a parent or other relative, and unknown, like someone encountered; 'intellectual stimulants' (books, movies, formal and informal education in the cases of the British socialist activists that Andrews interviewed); and finally, the role of highly visible movement organizations. These influences are supported by the Communist autobiographies engaged with here and made

reference to in the illustrative extract of an occupation of a Greek school. However, the examples analysed in this paper, despite the focus on the everyday, at are still extraordinary, shaped by particular histories and cultures (cf. Thomas, 2009), and conforming to a culturally specific representation of action. On the whole, younger children are rarely part of a 'movement', the cases of some working or marginalized children being an exception. So how might children living in more ordinary circumstances connect to activism during their childhoods?

Emotion, we suggest may be a way into answering that question. In the auto/biographies emotions are ever present in recollections of communist childhoods from 'sobs' and 'fiery speeches' to cheering, exhilaration and pride (Carlson, 1998) on the one hand, to feeling 'overwhelmed' and 'confused' (Hunter, 1998) and anger and pain (Lawson, 1998) on the other. As Dave (2012) has argued it is both affect and ethics that shape 'the practices of reflection and intimate relationality' of activist lives. This suggests to us that an affective engagement and analysis of children's emotional lives and what matters to them may be a productive way of thinking about children's connections to activism and the intersections between the personal and the political in childhood (cf. Moran-Ellis, Bandt, & Sünker, 2013). By engaging in the values, ethics and affects of everyday life and what matters to children and how they construct their relationships of concern (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Sayer, 2011), we may come to understand 'activism' as it emerges (or not) in children's everyday lives now and in the future.

In so doing it would be important to consider two things. The first is the differences between children's orientations to activism and those of their parents. A further theme from our analysis is generation. The theme of generation works in two ways, enmeshment on the one hand, and difference on the other. Contrary to dominant liberal discourses of children's participation (cf. Webb, 2015) the child emerges out of a configuration of relationships. Children's lives, their family lives and activist lives are intricately connected. The communist biographies we looked at provided a number of examples of the complex intergenerational transmission of radical socialist values. At the same time, parental activist concerns and commitments, and those of their children, can be very different. The biographies we explored also provided examples of divergences, the Greek school occupations being a case in point. The occupations of Greek schools by their students in the nineties, constitutes a (controversial and) rather radical act of resistance. The students were protesting the decisions of an institution – a designated authority on their best interests. The proposed legislation that triggered the protests, was seen by the students as a contravention of what they considered their interests to be lending further support to arguments that children's and adults' political imaginations are differently constituted (Kallio & Häkli, 2011).

The second consideration relates to how we might imagine activism in childhood. Here research on activism in politically oppressive regimes has something to offer. Following his analysis of the everyday lives of the poor, women and young people in the Middle East, Bayat (2010) argues for thinking about 'agency in (…) times of constraints' as a 'non-movement', a movement-in-waiting made up of dispersed and distant individuals and fragmented practices. These people and practices may or may not come together to form a movement under the right circumstances but conceptualizing their existence and actions within a movement discourse enables us to think about what Bayat (2010) calls their 'art of presence', those moments in which each individual creates the space to challenge the status quo and dares to imagine the future otherwise.

Concluding Remarks

There are a number of challenges with the approach to activism and childhood adopted in this paper: memories are treacherous (Frantz, 1998), autobiographies are only ever partial, and history, both lived and recollected, is overwhelming complex, often beyond comprehension and certainly impossible to fairly engage with in the space of a few hundred words. Yet, treachery towards powerful categories, an engagement with the plurality of fragmented narratives, and the complexity of the historical situations of activism and childhood alike may bring us closer to understanding what connects (or disconnects) people to activism. Approaching activism through the lens of children's everyday lives affords an analytical engagement with activism that holds the lived experiences, relationships and, emotional complexities of activists' lives in mind. From the perspective of childhood, and with the identified difficulties of studying children's political agency in mind (Kallio & Häkli, 2011), looking back at early political experiences and the things that mattered then and now, provides fruitful ground for identifying the spaces and times which give shape to the political in childhood and to follow how that develops across a lifetime.

Notes

i) The terms 'children' and 'young people' are often used interchangeably in the literature and research about 'young people's participation' often refers to children/young people aged 14 and above.

ii) The extract quoted here is from an interview of a student (named N.K.) who had actively participated in the school occupations of 1990/1991 and can be accessed at http://orthografos.blogspot.gr/2013/09/90-91.html. Other memoires from the school occupations of 1990/1991 can be accessed here: https://parallhlografos.wordpress.com/2011/01/10/καταλήψεις-9091/

Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

References

Ahmed, S. (2010). Feminist Killjoys (and other willful subjects). *The Scholar and Feminist Online,* 8.3. Retrieved from http://sfonline.barnard.edu/polyphonic/print_ahmed.htm

Alanen, L. (2001). Childhood as generational condition: Children's daily life in a central Finland town. In L. Alanen & B. Berry (Eds.), *Conceptualizing child-adult relations* (pp. 129-143). London, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Andrews, M. (1991). *Lifetimes of commitment: Aging, politics and psychology*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Andrews, M. (2007). *Shaping history: Narratives of political change*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Bauman, Z., & Bordoni, C. (2014). *State of crisis.* Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press.

Bayat, A. (2010). *Life as politics: How ordinary people change the Middle East*. Stanford, CA, USA: Stanford University Press.

Biekart, K., & Fowler, A. (2013). Transforming activisms 2010+: Exploring ways and waves. *Development and Change, 44*(3), 527-546. doi:10.1111/dech.12032

Butler, J. (2014, June). *Rethinking vulnerability and resistance*. Retrieved from http://www.institutofranklin.net/sites/default/files/files/Rethinking%20Vulnerability%20and%20Resistance%20Judith%20Butler.pdf

Boggs, C. (1978). Marxism, prefigurative communism and the problem of workers' control. *Radical America, 6*, 99-122.

Calhoun, C. (2013). Occupy Wall Street in perspective. *The British Journal of Sociology, 64*, 26-38. doi:10.1111/1468-4446.12002

Carlson, L. (1998). A Californian girl. In J. Kaplan & L. Shapiro (Eds.), *Red diapers: Growing up in the communist left* (pp. 20-26). Urbana, IL, USA: University of Illinois Press.

Crossley, N. (2002). *Making sense of social movements.* Buckingham, United Kingdom: Open University Press.

Dave, N. (2012). *Queer activism in India: A story in the anthropology of ethics*. Durham, NC, USA: Duke University Press.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2001). *Making social science matter: Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again.* Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Frantz, M. (1998). Teaching of Marx for girls and boys: Infiltrates Alabama. In J. Kaplan & L. Shapiro (Eds.), *Red diapers: Growing up in the communist left* (pp. 45-53). Urbana, IL, USA: University of Illinois Press.

Freire, P. (1994). *The pedagogy of hope: Reliving the pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York, NY, USA: Continuum.

Giovanopoulos, C., & Dalakoglou, D. (2011). From ruptures to eruption: A genealogy of post-dictatorial revolts in Greece. In A. Vradis & D. Dalakoglou (Eds.), *Revolt and crisis in Greece* (pp. 91-114). London, United Kingdom: AK Press.

Graeber, D. (2002). The new anarchists. *New Left Review, 13*, 61-73.

Haaken, J. (1998). *Pillar of salt: Gender, memory, and the perils of looking back.* New Jersey, NJ, USA: Rutgers University Press.

Haaken, J. (2010). *Hard knocks: Domestic violence and the psychology of storytelling*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Harvey, K. (1984). *The heydey of American Communism: The depression decade*. New York, NY, USA: Basic Books.

Hunter, R. (1998). From red diapers to protest banners. In J. Kaplan & L. Shapiro (Eds.), *Red diapers: Growing up in the communist left* (pp. 27-32). Urbana, IL, USA: University of Illinois Press.

Ios. (2006, July 2). 'Οι νίκες των φοιτητών' [Students' victories]. *Eleftherotypia.* Retrieved from http://www.iospress.gr/ios2006/ios20060702.htm

Jeffrey, C., & Dyson, J. (2014). "I serve therefore I am": Youth and generative politics in India. *Comparative Studies in Society and History, 56*, 967-994. doi:10.1017/S0010417514000462

Jeffrey, C., & Dyson, J. (2015, November). *Now: Prefigurative politics through a north Indian lens* (Working Paper 01, University of Oxford). Retrieved from http://www.geog.ox.ac.uk/staff/cjeffrey-wpaper01.pdf

Jeffrey, C., & Young, S. (2012). Waiting for change: Youth, caste and politics in India. *Economy and Society, 41*, 638-661. doi:10.1080/03085147.2011.635435

Kallio, K. P., & Häkli, J. (2011). Tracing children's politics. *Political Geography, 30*, 99-109. doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2011.01.006

Kaplan, J. (1998). Passage to Siberia. In J. Kaplan & L. Shapiro (Eds.), *Red diapers: Growing up in the communist left* (pp. 41-44). Urbana, IL, USA: University of Illinois Press.

Kaplan, J., & Shapiro, L. (Eds.). (1998). *Red diapers: Growing up in the communist left*. Urbana, IL, USA: University of Illinois Press.

Karamichas, J. (2009). The December 2008 riots in Greece. *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest, 8*, 289-293.

Lawson, J. (1998). An ordinary life. In J. Kaplan & L. Shapiro (Eds.), *Red diapers: Growing up in the communist left* (pp. 54-60). Urbana, IL, USA: University of Illinois Press.

Levitas, R. (2010). *The concept of utopia* (2nd ed.). Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang.

McLeod, J., & Thomson, R. (2009). *Researching social change.* London, United Kingdom: Sage.

Mizen, P. (2015). The madness that is the world: Young activists' emotional reasoning and their participation in their local Occupy movement. *The Sociological Review, 63*(Suppl. S2), 167-182.

Moran-Ellis, J., Bandt, A., & Sünker, H. (2013). Children's well-being and politics. In A. Ben-Arieh, F. Casas, I. Frønes, & J. E. Korbin (Eds.), *Handbook of child well-being: Theories, methods and policies in global perspectives* (pp. 415-436). New York, NY, USA: Springer.

Nolas, S.-M. (2014). Towards a new theory of practice for community health psychology. *Journal of Health Psychology, 19*(1), 126-136. doi:10.1177/1359105313500252

Nolas, S.-M. (2015). Children's participation, childhood publics, and social change: A review. *Children & Society, 29*(2), 157-167. doi:10.1111/chso.12108

N.K. (2013, September 17). *Ήμουν κι εγώ εκεί! Με τον Τσίπρα, στις καταλήψεις '90 – '91* [I was there too! With Tsipras, in the Occupations of '90 – '91] [Blog post]. Retrieved from http://orthografos.blogspot.gr/2013/09/90-91.html

Pechtelidis, Y. (2013). *Occupying school buildings in Greece of the memorandum: The discursive formations around pupils' political activism* (Network for the Analysis of Political Discourse Working Paper No. 3). Retrieved from http://www.democritics.net/discourse-analysis/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/pechtelidis.pdf

Psacharopoulos, G., & Kazamias, A. M. (1980). Student activism in Greece: A historical and empirical analysis. *Higher Education, 9*, 127-138. doi:10.1007/BF01680429

Rigos, A. (2007, March 24). The Skiadika accelerate the anti-ruler struggle. *Avgi*. Retrieved from http://www.avgi.gr/NavigateActiongo.action?articleID=305682

Robbins, S. J. (1998). What did I know and when did I know It? In J. Kaplan & L. Shapiro (Eds.), *Red diapers: Growing up in the communist left* (pp. 103-109). Urbana, IL, USA: University of Illinois Press.

Rodgers, D. (2005). Children as social movement participants. In D. A. Kinney & K. B. Rosier (Eds.), *Sociological studies of children and youth* (Vol. 11, pp. 239-259). Bingley, United Kingdom: Emerald Group Publishing.

Roseneil, S. (2000). *Common women, uncommon practices: The queer feminisms of Greenham*. London, United Kingdom: Cassell & Continuum.

Sassen, S. (Speaker), Warburton, N. (Interviewer) (2014). Saskia Sassen on before method [Audio podcast]. *Social Science Bites*. Retrieved from http://www.socialsciencespace.com/2014/05/saskia-sassen-on-before-method/

Sayer, A. (2011). *Why things matter to people: Social science, values and ethical life.* Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Segal, L. (2007). *Making trouble: Life and politics*. London, United Kingdom: Serpents Tail.

Thomas, N. (2009). *Children, politics and communication: Participation at the margins*. Bristol, United Kingdom: Policy Press.

Turner, E. (2012). *Communitas: The anthropology of collective joy.* New York, NY, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.

Turner, V. (1969). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. New York, NY, USA: PAJ Publications.

Ware, M. (1998). December 1947. In J. Kaplan & L. Shapiro (Eds.), *Red diapers: Growing up in the communist left* (pp. 62-69). Urbana, IL, USA: University of Illinois Press.

Webb, R. (2015). Negotiating the '3Rs': Deconstructing the politics of rights, respect and responsibility in one English primary school. In T. Dragonas, K. Gergen, S. McNamee, & E. Tseliou (Eds.), *Education as social construction: Contributions to theory, research and practice* (pp. 283-296). Chagrin Falls, OH, USA: Taos Institute Publications/World Share books. Retrieved from http://www.taosinstitute.net/education-as-social-construction

Weesjes, E. M. (2010). *Children of the red flag: Growing up in a communist family during the Cold War: A comparative analysis of the British and Dutch communist movement* (Doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom). Retrieved from http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/7572

Yates, L. (2015). Rethinking prefiguration: Alternatives, micropolitics and goals in social movements. *Social Movement Studies, 14*(1), 1-21. doi:10.1080/14742837.2013.870883