Book review

Social Justice for Children in the South

Graciela H. Tonon (Ed.)
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The conventional wisdom held is that children are our future. As such, honouring and protecting the legitimate rights of our future generations to adequate development opportunities are crucial to global mobility, international development, and social policy-making. This claim is further substantiated by a series of international laws and national policies concerning the protection of our children's equitable access to schooling, education, health and other resources for early life well-being. As codified in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:

> *"All children have all these rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what language they speak, what their religion is, what they think, what they look like, if they are a boy or girl, if they have a disability, if they are rich or poor, and no matter who their parents or families are or what their parents or families believe or do. No child should be treated unfairly for any reason." (1989, p.3)*

These documents serve as a sobering reminder of our shared responsibilities and duties as members of a certain family, community, and society. However, a thorough exploration of literature conducted by the author of this edited volume seems to suggest that the focus on issues related to children's rights in the Global South is often out-of-balance compared with the number of publications on the protection of children's rights in the Global North. With a strong focus on the South, *Social Justice for Children in the South* adopts a firm stance in advocating social justice and functions as an equaliser among diverse voices regarding children's rights in an increasingly globalised world.

This edited volume consists of ten chapters authored by eighteen contributors with considerable local knowledge of children's rights issues in developed (Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and developing countries (Argentina, Colombia, and South Africa). Written in an emphatic and rational style, this edited volume reviews a plethora of contextual factors that are considered indispensable for the accomplishments of social justice. These contextual factors are well-woven into the thematic debates and theoretical insights in each chapter. The themes and topics explored include but are not limited to (1) state policy-making efforts for vulnerable children, (2) public spending and investing in children and socio-economic measurements, (3) children's well-being during Covid-19, (4) exercises of rights for children through lived experiences in the pandemic lockdown, (5) social exclusion of

children from migrant families and ethnic minorities manifested through language (in)justice and digital divide in educational settings, (6) empowering children as agents of social change, and (7) social inclusion of children suffering armed conflicts.

Each chapter sheds light on one particular aspect of social justice related to the protection of children's rights in a specific geographic location. In Chapter 1, Tonon examines children's social vulnerability in the discourses of family, organisation, and public policies and its impact on social justice policy-making in Latin America during the COVID-19 pandemic. She concludes by reaffirming the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the UNICEF vision (see CEPAL-UNICEF, 2020) to consolidate a universal social protection system through secure and adequate social investment and child allowance.

In Chapter 2, Lavolpe examines the protection of children's rights as an inseparable part of human rights. He stresses that social inequalities and lack of opportunities for children to develop at the early stage of life could affect children's integration into social life and the ability to exercise their civil rights and duties (p.23). He concludes by advocating the integration of the protection of children's rights into state policies in Latin America in order to expand children's opportunities to realise their fullest potential in an equitable society.

In Chapter 3, Fiala and Delamonica quantitatively assess the distribution of government expenditures on public health and education services and their impact on child poverty and equity. They conclude by reiterating the importance of public investments in the social outcomes for children's quality of life as part of socio-economic justice (UNICEF, 2021).

In Chapter 4, Adams and Savahl analyse five principles of social justice - access to resources, equity, diversity, participation, and human rights - and their impacts on children's psychological well-belling during the pandemic in South Africa. They conclude by emphasising the need for special social policy considerations of children's rights, as the issue is part of South Africa's National Plan of Action for Children, Africa's Agenda for Children 2040, and the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

In Chapter 5, Tonon and Molgaray report the findings from questionnaire data collected from 21 boys and girls aged 8 to 12 in Argentina who were asked about their opinions and lived experiences during the stay-at-home period in the Covid-19 pandemic. They found that children expressed fears when they could not leave their homes and hang out with friends, which informed the families, children's rights organisations, and government agencies when making decisions about individual, family, and public health.

In Chapter 6, AlArasi, Martinez, and Amer present a case study conducted with 39 ethnic minority children in the Netherlands. In response to UNICEF's (2004) Building Child-friendly Cities: A Framework for Action, the contributors of this chapter used Google Maps to conduct geo-located observations of minority children's living environments and their interaction with their local neighbourhoods. Based on children's rights to spatial justice, participation, quality of life, and well-being (p.101), they stressed the need to incorporate the considerations for children's perspectives on their agency and participation through positive and negative living experiences in urban planning policy-making process.

In Chapter 7, Brando and Echeverry examine the discourses on child soldiers, particularly the self-concept held by disengaged girl soldiers in Colombia. Through the lenses of international and Colombian law and policy, they recommend that the administration hear the authentic voices of child soldiers when making social justice policies or sentencing child soldiers for protective, educational, and restorative purposes (p.125).

In Chapter 8, de Lamela and Bueno Conde examine the well-being of adolescents in rural and urban areas of India, particularly the way adolescents perceived themselves and the impact of their self-perceptions on their life expectations and aspirations. They highlight a well-being approach to policy-making that prioritises the quality of social relationships in children's early life experiences from socio-economically underprivileged backgrounds.

In Chapter 9, Biggeri and Arciprete delve into the role of children in activism and social movements. Resorting to their integrated social citizenship, capability, and multidimensional child poverty dynamics framework (pp. 162-163), they analyse case studies of the deprivations of children's rights and the role of children's agency and participation in education, knowledge production, and socio-political activities. They conclude by endorsing the stance marked by UNICEF (2020) and other children's rights organisations and civil societies (e.g., Global March Against Child Labour) on fostering meaningful youth participation.

In Chapter 10, which is the concluding chapter of this volume, Walther proposes a multidimensional paradigm, POZE (p.177), consisting of four parameters - Perspective, a holistic view of life; Optimisation, through conscious influence on the dimensions that shape living; Zeniths, the pursuit of one's best self; and Exposure, to reality as it is. Built on the legal entitlements of every child to survive and thrive, she analyses the development of the soul, heart, mind, and body of the individual child and its impact on micro (individual), meso (community), macro (society) and meta (planet) levels. She concludes by supporting the holistic understanding of social justice as a 'win-win-win-win' (p.177) for the well-being of every child, their community, society, and the world.

With social justice in mind, one sure strength of the edited volume is the rich social justice-informed and well-being-centred debates on a number of children's rights critical issues in the Global South during the pandemic. By drawing on theoretical insights from several neighbouring disciplines in social science, such as political science, policy studies, education, psychology, sociology, and sociolinguistics, the arguments presented here make a powerful contribution to our understanding of the complexities and ramifications of social class in a media-driven society.

Overall, the edited volume takes us on a brilliant tour through social analysis, covering theoretical debates and key research areas of social mobility, education, health, and politics. It provides a panoramic overview supported by the thorough analysis of ethnographic accounts in which the contributors interpret data and examine evidence at macro and micro levels. Contributors of this edited volume help us to disentangle contested views and perspectives and make it accessible to a general and professional readership with digestible and easy-to-understand concepts. The edited volume is thus recommended for readers interested in children's rights, well-being, and social and economic inequalities, as well as those trying to understand a contested concept of social justice.

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