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Thatcher's Grandchildren? Politics and Childhood in the Twenty-First Century

Introducing this collection, the editors note that it is 'a sequel' to, 'not a second edition' of, *Thatcher's Children?* (p. x; Pilcher and Wagg, 1996). And in bringing the political story of childhood up to date (focusing on 1996 to 2014) it is, perhaps inevitably, Tony Blair more than Margaret Thatcher that takes centre stage. He was, as Danny Dorling neatly reminds us here, 'born in the same year as Mrs Thatcher's twins' (p. 89) and David Rudd playfully and insightfully suggests that 'it seems more than coincidental that Blair's years as Prime Minister chime exactly with the Harry Potter publishing phenomenon (1997–2007), the former sweeping through Whitehall like a new broom, just as Harry Potter, at Hogwarts, actually rode one. Youth was in the air' (p. 121). But the extent to which he can or should be understood to be her political heir is a question that many of the contributions here grapple with. For Dorling ('"What Have the Romans Ever Done for Us?" Child Poverty and the Legacy of "New" Labour') there is no doubt that New Labour is merely an 'appendage' to Thatcherism (p. 99). But other commentators, while equally attuned to increasing inequality, take a more nuanced approach.

Nigel Parton ('The Changing Politics and Practice of Child Protection and Safeguarding in England') notes that New Labour policies heralded a shift from 'dangerousness' to 'risk': a broadening of focus that legitimised increased surveillance. He then proceeds to contrast this with the approach of the Coalition government (and one might add the current government) and observes a further shift towards an authoritarian neoliberal state. Tim Newburn

('Punishment, Populism and Performance Management: "New" Labour, Youth, Crime and Justice') and Stephen Wagg ('Whiteboard Jungle: Schooling, Culture War and the Market at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century') similarly provide thoughtful overviews of the youth justice and education systems respectively, both noting changes as well as continuities. Wagg notes that people who wished to question or challenge the shifts in policies have been increasingly marginalised, and that one consequence of this has been that a 'principle setting for opposition to change visited on British schooling has been a burgeoning network of blogs, websites and pressure groups' (p. 192). The concern expressed here is salutary for academics encouraged to think about the 'impact' of their work, for how policy is made is, directly and indirectly, a theme that runs through the collection, and the collective 'finding' is that simplistic ideology trumps rigorous empirical research, or, more accurately, the latter only has 'impact' when translated or utilised to confirm and legitimise the former.

A brilliant example of this is the contribution by Val Gillies ('Troubling Families: Parenting and the Politics of Early Intervention'). She starts by helpfully noting that neoliberalism is 'a term that has been put to promiscuous and often reductive use but few can question the radical assault on social values it is intended to describe' (p. 204). Echoing Parton's analysis, she maps a shift towards increasing surveillance and the redrawing of understandings of parental privacy. But she also highlights the extent to which many of the well intentioned reforms focusing on prevention and early years intervention are premised on flimsy scientific evidence which has been crudely translated into an 'almost evangelical faith in the power of good parenting to compensate for social disadvantage' (p. 210).

In mapping the political reconfiguration of 'the family', Gillies also notes how progressive 'critiques of the family have been co-opted to propagate an advancing neoliberal ethos' (p. 206). This argument has led to spirited responses and debate elsewhere (May, 2012; Wilkinson and Bell, 2012). But in this

context the identification of the resonance between a shift to a 'child centred' approach and the development of problematic individualised accounts and policies provides a provocative contrast with children's rights narratives.

The only chapter to address children's rights explicitly is by Marc Cornock and Heather Montgomery ('Children's Rights since Margaret Thatcher'). They note that Thatcher's Grandchildren 'are those who came to adulthood under a new era of children's rights and, more than any other generation, are those on whom the impact of these social changes is most apparent' (p. 160). While they present a timely critique of the influential research about the 'unhappiness' of British children, their recounting of *Gillick* and the retreat from *Gillick* will be familiar territory for lawyers. It is also surprisingly uncritical: the possibility of reading these cases as legitimising the autonomy of doctors (as opposed to or even more than that of children) is overlooked, as is the wider critique of children's rights as a tool for 'empowering' children to do what adults and the state want them to do. Instead of asking, 'why the state does not recognise children's rights' a more revealing question is 'who benefits when the children have been awarded rights'.

The limits and contingency of 'rights' are clearly demonstrated by a number of the other contributors. Steve Cunningham and Michale Lavallete's discussion of child labour is the only contribution that introduces an international dimension ('Children's Rights or Employers' Rights? The "Destigmatisation" of Child Labour'). They urge caution about accepting arguments that protection does more harm than good but suggest that 'children's rights' can in some ways intentionally or otherwise aid inequalities.

No subject is more fraught in the context of children's rights and childhood than sex, and the contributions here indicate that it remains a key fault line. Julia O'Connell Davidson ('Child Trafficking: Known Unknowns and Unknown Knowns') notes that the 'Gothic story of child molesting works to protect socially cherished ideals of childhood' (p. 85). Her analysis here is similar to the framework offered by Patricia Holland who made the compelling but challenging argument that 'pathetic images of children create a desired image in which childhood is no longer a threat and adults are back in control' (2004, p. 143). For Davidson the critique enables her to reach the conclusion that 'it is all too easy for anti-trafficking measures to simply become anti-child labour migration measures' (p. 82). While carefully avoiding generalisations she argues that 'not every child who is found in prostitution is selling sex because a "trafficker" or "pimp" is forcing them to do so. Dull economic compulsion operates on persons under as well as above, the age of 18' (p. 84).

Similarly challenging, but all the more welcome for it, are the questions raised by David Buckingham and Despina Chronaki ('Saving the Children? Pornography, Childhood and the Internet'). Troubling binaries of innocence and autonomy and questioning the definition of 'pornography', they suggest that young people themselves can recognise that sexual 'representations serve different functions for different people, and provide opportunities for both pleasure and learning' (p. 314). Further developing the critique of concerns about the 'sexualisation' of childhood, Jane Pilcher argues that young people's own understandings and experiences of clothing are not always the same as adults ('The Politics of Children's Clothing'). Pilcher's contribution is particularly valuable for highlighting the significance of gender.

A theme that links a number of contributions is technology and media. Keri Facer attempts to forge a new approach to the use of technology that finds a role for thinking about rights ('Recolonising the Digital Narratives: The Politics of Childhood and Technology from Blair to Gove'). For Julian Petley ('"Kill a Kid and Get a House": Rationality versus Retribution in the Case of Robert Thompson and Jon Venables, 1993–2001'), the role of the media is negative. Bob Franklin takes a more nuanced approach in his analysis of the online media narratives about Baby P ('Citizen Journalists or Cyber Bigots? Child Abuse, the Media and the Possibilities for Public Conversation: The Case of Baby P'). He offers thoughtful reflections on developing methods for researching online media that can respond to its sheer vastness. As he reminds us, YouTube alone has 92 billion page views a month (p. 34). And while he does not accept without question the 'optimism of those who envisage social media facilitating a more pluralistic, democratic and productive citizen conversation about policy in a revitalised public sphere' (p. 29), he concludes by suggesting that a 'removal of anonymity would improve the quality of debate' (p. 42). Taking the long view, Stephen Wagg identifies a degree of continuity in the role of celebrities and public figures in Comic Relief and similar contemporary television and media campaigns and earlier Victorian child saving campaigns ('"When I Give Food to the Poor … " Some Thoughts on Charity, Childhood and the Media').

The contributions by David Rudd ('A Coming or Going of Age? Children's Literature at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century') and David Buckingham ('Kids

for Sale? Childhood and Consumer Culture') both place debates about childhood centre stage. Focusing on very different material, both identify and grapple with the reductionism of much of the literature in the field. There are illuminating parallels between Rudd's analysis of the contemporary child reader and Buckingham's child consumer which helpfully encapsulate the challenges facing so many scholars in this area. Rudd notes the very real shifts that have occurred, but what is striking is the extent to which childhood still remains the sight of redemptive possibilities – however 'adult-like' the new idealised child reader might be. And for Buckingham, thinking beyond structure and agency throws light on both the stigmatisation of the consumption practices of children and the intersection with inequality.

This is a rich and varied collection. Covering a wide range of issues, in places it offers a rigorous audit as opposed to new theoretical insights and in this respect it is 'politics' and children, more than 'childhood', that takes centre stage. But in bringing together commentators from across the social sciences and applied disciplines it presents an effective 'history of the present' which will be of much value to students and scholars. Read as a whole it makes a compelling case for the need for all scholars to take childhood seriously, for as the contributions here demonstrate childhood is not only central to political debates but goes to the heart of debates about subjectivity and the role of the state.

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The Challenge of Legal Pluralism: Local Dispute Settlement and the Indian-State Relationship in Ecuador

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Legal systems and legal scholarship both tend to emphasise analytical distinctions. Thus, we frequently see arguments about whether specific categories of behaviour should be legal or illegal, permissible or impermissible, included within the jurisdictional boundaries or excluded, and so on. The real world, of course, never fully cooperates with these analytical frameworks. People in their daily lives fudge the categories, intuitively mixing their own sense of morality, custom, community norm, formal law, bureaucratic license and sense of resistance together into a hodgepodge of legality.

Eugen Ehrlich (2017) called this hodgepodge 'living law' many decades ago, and legal pluralist scholars have often taken it as their mission to remind others studying law and culture that law is not only found in the formal apparatuses of the centralised state. Yet, in their zeal to emphasise the importance of 'customary' law or 'local' law or 'traditional' law, pluralists too can sometimes lapse into frameworks that juxtapose formal and informal law as if that jurisdictional boundary had clear divisions. So, for example, we hear about state *versus* non-state law, or about customary *law as a site of resistance to* the central authority, or the ways in which indigenous law *operates as an alternative to* state law, and so on. In such a formulation, we might mistakenly limit legal pluralism to a clear clash of legal fora, restricting our gaze to people 'choosing' one legal system over another or operating one system 'in parallel with' the other, or 'in opposition to' the other and so on.

Therefore, every once in a while, it is good to be reminded that these categories of formal and indigenous, customary and official, are also far less rigidly delineated in daily life than either legal systems or scholars might often conceptualise them. And this is true even in countries such as Ecuador that have tried to build legal pluralism into their constitutional structure. Indeed, although indigenous Indian legal systems in Ecuador are given separate semi-autonomous status as a matter of national law,