

Abstract

The Priceless Child on the Global Periphery: Or, How Bolivia Changed its Child Labor Laws

Isabel Jijon

2018

One in ten children around the world is engaged in child labor, in activities the International Labor Organization (ILO) considers harmful for children's health, education, and development (2017: 19). Millions of people work worldwide to eliminate this practice, establishing marches, campaigns, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international legislation. This dissertation examines the impact of this legislation. I ask: how do global norms shape the local law and practice of child labor.

Scholars, activists, and policy makers often assume that global norms compete against local culture, against local representations of work and childhood. In this view, this is a zero-sum game where only one or the other set of meanings can win. Therefore, if child labor persists it must be because local actors are rejecting global norms, because global norms have failed to change local ideas. In this dissertation, I show that this is only partly true and that this perspective fundamentally misunderstands culture. I argue instead that global norms have multiple, potentially conflicting meanings, that they are always read in relation to other global texts and representations. So people also defend child labor – or certain forms of child labor – by interpreting different globally-circulating, globally-institutionalized ideas. In other words, the “fight against child labor” can be undermined not only by local resistance but also by global contradictions, complicating scholarship, policy, and interventions.

Empirically, this dissertation examines the case of child labor in Bolivia. On July 17, 2014, Bolivia became the first country in the world to lower the minimum age for employment, apparently

rejecting the global moral stance against this practice. Drawing on 112 in-depth interviews with members of international organizations, NGOs, government, and working children's unions, as well as with working children themselves, this dissertation reconstructs how these actors justify or criticize Bolivia's new law, how they argue in favor or against the "morality of child labor." I find that while many people talk about child labor as a reflection of the "local economic reality" and the "local traditional Indigenous culture," most of their arguments are, in fact, global in origin. Almost all interviewees rely on the language of children's rights – enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – and on globally-institutionalized representations of what Zelizer (1985) calls "the priceless child." They all draw on the same global resources to make different local arguments. They all make local arguments by combining and contrasting global resources in different ways.

Theoretically, this dissertation introduces the idea of "global norm intertextuality," meaning that people write, read, and make sense of international laws and conventions by considering how they relate to other texts, institutions, and cultural repertoires. Therefore, I propose that we move away from an instrumental view of global diffusion and instead adopt a more hermeneutic approach. Building on previous research on "diffusion as a cultural act" (Levitt and Merry 2009: 444) as well as theories of translation, I introduce a hermeneutic model of cultural globalization. I pay special attention to the ways global norms acquire cultural, institutional, and textual "baggage" over time, as well as the ways intermediary actors contend with and translate this baggage. In this way, I contribute to studies of the cultural sociology of markets, the new sociology of childhood, research on the globalization of law, as well as public policies on children's rights and child labor.

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A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of
Yale University
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Isabel Jijon

Dissertation Director: Philip Smith

May 2018

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all the people who advised me, supported me, and put up with me as I researched and wrote this dissertation: Philip Smith, Frederick Wherry, Tamara Kay, Jeffrey Alexander, Celso Villegas, and the participants of the Yale Center for Cultural Sociology who provided feedback for several chapters. I also want to thank the people who agreed to participate in my interviews, sharing their expertise and experiences with enthusiasm and candor. Thank you as well to Santiago Jijón, Cecilia Pérez, Margarita Velasco, Farith Simon, Fabricio Guerrero, and Allan Heldbjerg for helping me access crucial interviewees, for prying open hard-to-open doors.

I am especially grateful for Ana María López, my cheerleader, travel companion, interview guru, and part-time gourmet chef, who made my fieldwork the most enjoyable part of my graduate studies; for Roberto Valdez, my emotional counsel and emotional punching-bag, who saw this project go from half-formed idea to a final product; for my father, Xavier Jijón, who always reminded me how to keep things in perspective and stay sane; and, most importantly, for my mother, Carolina Reed, who heard me discuss and dissect and distress over every idea, every argument, every dead-end, who motivated me to move forward, who pushed me to think deeper, who deserves an honorary PhD for her troubles. This is all thanks to you.

Introduction: How global representations shape the local law and practice of child labor.

The puzzle

On December 18, 2013, a group of working children and adolescents – street traders, market vendors, domestic workers, and shoe-shiners – marched towards the Presidential Palace in La Paz, Bolivia. They were protesting a law entering debate in the Senate which, in accordance with the International Labor Organization (ILO), stated that children could only work after turning 14. The working children, however, wanted the government to eliminate all minimum age restrictions. They wanted the government to grant them the “right to work” (NTN24 2013).

This march goes against globally circulating, globally institutionalized representations of childhood. Childhood is a cultural construction (Prout and James 2015: 8): who is labeled a child, until what age, and with what associated roles and responsibilities varies across space and over time (Ariès 2005 [1962]; Corsaro 2015; Mintz 2004). But, over the past hundred years, a specific “ideology of childhood” has spread around the world (Boli and Meyer 1978). International actors like the ILO and international texts like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child have institutionalized what Zelizer (1985) calls the “priceless” view of childhood, the idea that childhood is a sacred, vulnerable, virtuous period of life that must be protected from the polluting, adult worlds of work and money (Boyle, Smith, and Guenther 2007; Gran 2017).

The ILO prohibits child labor because this practice goes against the priceless view of childhood, because it “deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity” (IPEC 2004: 16). And many people around the world seem to agree: Most countries have signed the ILO’s conventions and have passed national regulations against child employment (Boli and Meyer 1978; Boyle, Smith, and Guenther 2007). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is “the most ratified international convention on record” (Caseldine-Bracht 2012: 227). Millions of advocates, activists, and NGOs are involved in the “global fight against child labor” (Dottridge 2009; Harma

2009; Hindman 2009). They fight, as Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi has said, to bring “safety, liberty, dignity and education for all children of the world” (Satyarthi 2016).

And yet the working children in Bolivia marched. What is more, these children are not alone. The marchers were all members of UNATSBO, the Bolivian Union of Working Children and Adolescents.¹ UNATSBO is, in turn, part of MOLACNATs, the Latin American and Caribbean Movement of Working Children and Adolescents.² There are similar groups in India and several African countries and, while each has a different structure and history, they all share UNATSBO’s controversial aim: they all defend certain forms of child labor (Coly and Terenzio 2007; Lieten 2009; Myers 2009; Plateau 2007; Reddy 2007; Roschanski 2009).

What makes the Bolivian case different is that, here, the working children’s march worked: The children in Bolivia were able to convince government officials to change laws on the minimum age for employment. When the marchers approached Plaza Murillo, La Paz’s central square, the police blocked their path with plastic shields and metal barriers. The children tried to push past the barriers but the police pushed back, throwing children to the ground, arresting adolescents, and, eventually, covering the crowd in tear gas. Journalists immediately reported on these protests and decried the police’s use of force. Politicians, child welfare organizations, the Church, and the Ombudsman expressed their indignation (NTN24 2013). Government officials, eager to contain the scandal, met with the working children. A few days later, UNATSBO representatives were received by President Evo Morales himself. After the meeting, Morales made a public statement, saying that he understood the marchers as he too had been a child worker. He said: “My experience, my position [is]: we should not eliminate the work of girls, boys, and adolescents, but we should also not exploit them or encourage them to work. Some work out of necessity. *Eliminating child labor is like eliminating their social conscience*” (quoted in Perez and Corz 2013, emphasis added).

¹ Unión de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes de Bolivia.

² Movimiento Latinoamericano y del Caribe de Niños, Niñas, y Adolescentes Trabajadores.

On July 17, 2014, the Bolivian government presented a new version of the childhood law. Law 548, or the Code Girl, Boy, and Adolescent, still states that children can only work after turning 14 (Article 129, Paragraph I). But the law makes exceptions: under certain conditions, the local Child and Adolescent Advocacy Offices can now authorize children to sign a contract and work for a third party after age 12 (Article 129, Paragraph II). And, under certain conditions, the Advocacy Offices can now authorize children to work independently – shining shoes, selling in markets, trading on the streets – after age 10 (Article 129, Paragraph II). Bolivia, in other words, became the first country to lower the minimum age for employment, openly rejecting global representations against child labor.

The argument

In this dissertation, I ask why: Why do working children defend their “right to work”? Why did the Bolivian government, in this instance, listen? What can this case tell us about how global representations affect the local law and practice of child labor?

Both critics and supporters of Bolivia have claimed that the new childhood law is a response to *local* conditions. Politicians, journalists, and activists often say that the law reflects the “local economic reality” – children are poor and need to work– or the “local traditional Indigenous culture” – work and childhood mean something different in Bolivia than in the rest of the world (Agencia EFE 2013; Corz 2014; El Día 2016; Lind 2016; NTN24 2013; Pérez and Corz 2013; Stewart 2017; Zapana 2014). In the law’s promulgation ceremony, for instance, Vice-President Álvaro García Linera called the law a “just equilibrium” between global conventions and the Bolivian experience (Corz 2014). He said: “It was difficult because there is a set of international conventions that the State has signed [...] and there is a reality, a Bolivian reality, an inheritance, a form of working, our own modality of work, and the situation of children and adolescents in this country” (quoted in Corz 2014). In this view, global representations of childhood bump against

local representations, as well as the local economic context. It is a zero-sum game between different moral evaluations of child labor.

Sociologists and anthropologists have a more nuanced view of culture. We do not see culture as an obstacle to be removed, a barrier to overcome, a fixed, timeless “thing.” Rather, culture is a context, a language we all use to make sense of and act in and transform the social world (Alexander and Smith 2010; Levitt and Merry 2009; Merry 2006; Wherry 2012). Therefore, global representations do not “bump into” local representations. Gatekeepers and cultural brokers need to translate and adapt global representations, first making them intelligible for the local audience (Bielsa 2014; Levitt and Merry 2009). Different actors try to fit global ideas into local structures of meaning, transforming the ideas and the structures in the process (Kuipers 2015).

And yet, many scholars still rely on a zero-sum logic. In their recent review of the literature on globalization and law, Halliday and Osinsky (2006) write:

Our analysis of the research and theory in this field leads to the general hypothesis that the farther globalizing legal norms and practices are located from core local institutions and beliefs, the less likely that these norms and practices will provoke explicit contestation and confrontation. Obversely, the closer the globalizing legal norms and institutions are to transformations in core local values and practices, the more likely that contestation will occur around these norms (448).

In short, this is still a story of “the global” versus “the local.” Bolivia, it would seem, rejected global minimum age standards because of something particular to Bolivia, because global norms against child labor touched upon core local ideas about work and childhood.

In this dissertation, I argue that this is only partly true. I show that the globalization of minimum age standards failed also (and mostly) because of *global* resistance. The working children and the Bolivian government rejected one global norm – the minimum age for employment – because they adopted other global norms, texts, and images on child labor and childhood – the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the notion of children’s participation rights, and an abstracted version of what Zelizer (1985) calls the “priceless child.” Therefore, this is not a story of global versus local. This is a story of a global law’s multiple, potentially conflicting meanings.

In 1985, Viviana Zelizer changed how sociologists understand child labor – and market life more broadly – with her book, *Pricing the Priceless Child*. In it, Zelizer traces how different actors in the 19th and early 20th century United States came to see children as sacred, and therefore illegitimate market actors. In the 1830s, people assigned children an economic value: a child was “worth” whatever she could contribute to the household. But, by the 1930s, cultural ideas about childhood shifted so that children became “economically useless but emotionally priceless” (209): a child’s worth was now incalculable, a child was seen as inherently, emotionally valuable. Reformers, in other words, created new moral, cultural representations of childhood, what Zelizer calls “the priceless child.”

Empirically, this dissertation picks up where Zelizer left off. I show how in the early 20th century, different actors in the global North took representations of the priceless child and wrote them into international norms and conventions. I then look at how these norms and conventions have spread around the world, at how different actors on the global periphery interpret, transform, and repurpose the priceless child. Finally, I ask how working children themselves contend with these globally-diffused, locally-translated representations. I show how the priceless child on the global periphery talks back.

Theoretically, this dissertation asks how global representations shape the local law and practice of child labor. In a nutshell, I argue that they do so in multiple, messy, contradictory ways. Global representations do not have a single, stable meaning. Rather, they acquire meaning as they are read in relation to other representations and texts. In what follows, I propose a theory on the intertextuality of global norms. In this way, I contribute to research on child labor, to the cultural sociology of markets, the new sociology of childhood, and studies of globalization and law.

Child labor: Definitions and estimates

The ILO does not consider that all work done by children to be “child labor,” only work that is somehow harmful for a child (IPEC 2004: 16). Since 2008, the ILO distinguishes between:

1. “Children in employment,” which means all children occupied in any market or non-market production, in formal or in informal economies, inside or outside the family setting, part-time or full-time, for pay, for cash in kind, or without pay (ILO 2017: 16);
2. “Children in child labor,” which means all children in employment that also are under the national minimum age or are doing “hazardous work” (17); and
3. “Children in the worst forms of child labor,” which means children in intolerable occupations like bonded labor, armed conflicts, pornography, prostitution, drug trafficking, or children in “hazardous work” which is “night work, long hours, exposure to physical, psychological, or sexual abuse; work underground, under water, at dangerous heights or confined spaces; work with dangerous machinery, equipment, and tools, or which involves the manual handling or transport of heavy loads; and work in an unhealthy environment which may, for example, expose children to hazardous substances, agents, or processes, or to temperatures, noise levels, or vibrations damaging their health” (17).

Of the three categories, the ILO only considers the last two to be “child labor,” a problem that states, employers, and parents should eliminate (2017: 1). The ILO believes that “light work” can be good for children, and defines this practice as the employment of children ages 12 to 14 that is not harmful, does not interfere with school, and is less than 14 hours a week (17). Also, the ILO does not consider household chores –such as “caring for household members; cleaning and minor household repairs; cooking and serving meals; washing and ironing clothes; and transporting or accompanying family members to and from work and school” (17) – to be a form of child labor. The organization calls chores: “non-economic” work (17).

152 million children – 88 million boys and 64 million girls – are engaged in activities that the ILO defines as child labor (ILO 2017: 23). Of these children, 71 percent work in agriculture (23). 69 percent work for their families (23). Almost half fall under category three, “children in the worst forms of child labor,” a total of 73 million children (23).

The numbers are high – as the ILO writes, “a hypothetical country made up of only these children would rank as the world’s ninth largest” (ILO 2017: 24). But the numbers are also much lower than those of past decades. In 2000, there were 246 million children in child labor (27). In 2000, twice as many children conducted hazardous work (11).

Still, the global reduction of child labor slowed down from 2012 to 2016 and most of the decrease involved adolescents ages 15 to 17, not children ages 5 to 11 (ILO 2017: 12). Also, from 2012 to 2016, the child labor of boys reduced more than that of girls (25). And child labor rates have gone up in Africa, in spite of national efforts against this practice (25). The ILO is less optimistic in its 2017 report than in those of previous years.

Although nine out of every ten children in child labor live in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific (ILO 2017: 28), child labor occurs around the world, in both the global South and the global North (28). But the type of work does vary across regions: all children are more likely to work in agriculture, but in Asia and the Pacific one fifth of child labor occurs in industry (34) and in the Americas one in three children in child labor works in the service sector (34), like the working children who marched in Bolivia.

Economists and policy analysts have studied many causes of child labor. They find macro-economic factors, like a nation’s income inequality (Basu and Van 1998; Swinnerton and Rogers 1999), its degree of economic growth (Hazan and Berdugo 2002), and its openness to global markets (Edmonds and Pavcnick 2000). Economists also find micro-economic factors, like subsistence poverty (Basy and Van 1998), differential returns to schooling (Emerson and Knabb 2006), and imperfect credit markets (Ranjann 1999; for a helpful review see Fors 2010). And economists note the relevance of household determinants: Whether or not a child engages in child

labor depends on (1) the child's resources, like household income, parents' employment, parents' education, the educational level of the community; (2) the child's structural position, like her gender, birth order, number of siblings, size of extended family, if she lives in a rural or urban area, the availability of educational facilities; and (3) the child's cultural environment, the shared, inter-subjective ideas about gender, childhood, and the morality of work that permeate the child's social world (Webbink, Smits, and de Jong 2013: 822-826).

This last point, however, is still often misunderstood. We know that shared moral norms, narratives, and representations – like representations of “the priceless child” – influence whether or not a child will work (López-Calva 2002; Patrinos and Shafiq 2010). But we still don't know *how* this culture matters: How do these beliefs persist and change? How do they move across national and cultural borders? How do they shape the lives of working children themselves?

Most economic and policy researchers bracket culture and focus on other variables instead. Alternatively, researchers use clumsy proxies for culture, like ethnicity or whether the head of the household was a child worker (Patrinos and Shafiq 2010). Policymakers and children's rights activists, like the political commentators in Bolivia, often treat culture as a fixed obstacle that they should, somehow, remove. NGOs, activists, and states talk about “sensitizing” and “raising awareness” among local communities (IPEC 2002: 5). But, as Merry (2006) writes, culture “does not serve as a barrier to human rights mobilization but as a context that defines relationships and meanings and constructs the possibilities of action” (9). We need, in other words, to “un-bracket” culture and see how, exactly, it relates to child labor.

Un-bracketing meanings: The cultural sociology of markets

Culture is the inter-subjective, often taken-for-granted categories, codes, and meanings that enable and constrain social action (Alexander and Smith 2010). As Wherry (2012) explains: “just as people are born into a culture with a language and a structure of language that existed before they were born, so too do individuals find themselves by birth or by migration to inhabit a shared

sense about how the world is ordered (or at least about how things ought to be ordered and done)” (7). So culture is not fixed: Just as people can transform language, individuals can, collectively, transform culture. Meanings and stories and orders are always contested, dynamic, and hybrid (Merry 2006: 9). And culture is not simply picked up and removed: Just as people learn language, people have to learn culture, interpret, perform, and inhabit culture, connecting new ideas to pre-existing categories and concepts (Levitt and Merry 2009).

The cultural sociology of markets uses this more robust definition of culture to study economic processes. Scholars have found that narratives, rituals, and structures of meaning shape every aspect of economic life. Culture, for instance, influences market demand. People want what they want because they connect emotionally with the images and symbols mobilized by advertisers (Holt 2004), because they develop “brand communities” (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001) and tastes associated to those of their peers (Lizardo 2006), because they become engrossed by national myths about the French-ness of wine or the English-ness of beer; accidents of history are turned into romantic stories about national essence (Wherry 2012: 27). People’s judgments over what to buy, how to buy, and for whom “are moral judgments about what a man is, what a woman is, how a man ought to treat his aged parents, how much of a start in life he ought to give his sons and daughters” (Douglas and Isherwood 1979: 37). The act of shopping itself may be an “activity you undertake nearly every day in order to obtain goods for those people for whom you are responsible” (Miller 1998: 2), but it is also an act of love, a ritual in which people re-inscribe the affective meanings of their closest social bonds (2).

Culture also affects market supply. People produce what they produce because organizations provide cultural roles and frames of reference, they help people understand what they should want, why they should want it, and how to work to achieve it (Ho 2009). Organizations also can encourage people to sell or to donate by creating and sustaining moral accounts of altruism (Healy 2006). And nations have particular cultural and political histories that make certain industry or business decisions thinkable or unthinkable (Biggart and Guillén 1999; Dobbin 1994). In his

comparative study of how the railway industry developed in the United States, Britain, and France, Dobbin (1994) finds that “history has produced distinct ideas about order and rationality in different nations, and modern industrial policies are organized around those ideas” (2).

Culture even shapes how people use and understand more abstract economic instruments. People give money names and moral inflections – “‘dirty’ money, ‘easy’ money, or ‘blood’ money,” for instance (Zelizer 2011: 90). People use money – or gifts or tips or allowances or bribes – to “affirm, contest, or dissolve the meanings of the relationships that people believe themselves to be in” (Wherry 2012: 82). People tell moral stories about how others evaluate prices, calling each other “foolish, faithful, frivolous, or frugal” (Wherry 2008). People tell moral stories about economic statistics and indicators, like country risk (De Santos 2009). And people tell moral stories about the market as a whole, whether its “civilizing, destructive, or feeble” (Fourcade and Healy 2007; see also Alexander 2011). These stories, representations about how things ought to be, motivate people to act in the market. And by acting, people continually create and recreate the market (for reviews of the field, see Spillman 2011, Wherry 2012, or Zelizer’s 2011).

One of the most influential scholars in the cultural sociology of markets is Viviana Zelizer. And one of her most important books is on culture and child labor. In *Pricing the Priceless Child* (1985), Zelizer draws on historical documents – books, speeches, court cases, instruction manuals, and laws – to study how representations of childhood changed from the 1830s to the 1930s in the United States. She looks at public debates over children’s insurance, baby markets, wrongful death settlements, as well as child labor. She tracks the emergence of a cultural construction she calls the “priceless child.”

Zelizer argues that in the nineteenth century people gave children a monetary value based on their economic usefulness – juries, for example, were instructed to calculate damages for a child’s death by considering “the probable value of services of the deceased from the time of his death to the time he would have attained his majority, less the expense of his maintenance during the same time” (quoted in Zelizer 1985: 142). A century later, however, cultural ideas about

childhood changed. Reformers, progressives, and members of the clergy proposed a new moral story about childhood, one where children were economically useless but emotionally valuable or “priceless.” By the twentieth century, courts were awarding parents much larger sums of money not for rational, utilitarian calculations but for emotional reasons like “the mental pain and suffering caused by the death of a minor child” (153) or as “compensation for the loss of society and companionship of a child” (154).

Zelizer (1985) describes this as a process of “sacralization,” in which moral entrepreneurs gradually defined children as sacred and innocent, removing them from the profane world of work. She also notes that moral entrepreneurs aimed to change both institutions and people’s worldviews. Zelizer writes: “Advocates of child labor legislation were determined to regulate not only factory hours but family feeling. They introduced a new cultural equation: If children were useful and produced money they were not being properly loved” (72). People created new cultural, moral representations and aimed to change laws, families, and deeper structures of meaning.

Zelizer offer a useful starting point in order to understand the working children in Bolivia. But the debates in La Paz are also different to those she studied. First, the Bolivian debates directly involve working children, whose march lit the spark that started the debate and led to a new child labor law. Second, these debates take place in the context of cultural globalization, actors are talking across national and cultural lines and are all drawing from national and transnational representations of childhood. In other words, we need to understand the role both children and globalization played in the Bolivian context. We need to understand the role both children and globalization play in economic practices more broadly.

The cultural sociology of markets has focused mostly on how culture shapes economic practices at the local level, how local ideas about right and wrong, fair and unfair, the sacred and the profane influence the way people understand goods and services, understand market actors, and understand the rules of exchange (Spillman 1999). But people around the world are also increasingly connected; people, money, objects, images, and representations of right and wrong,

the sacred and the profane, now travel across borders, faster and farther than ever before (Holton 2005). There is a recent push within this subfield to look at how globalization shapes the culture of markets, with scholars looking at how actors interpret the same market differently in different cultural contexts (Chan 2009), how actors present their local products, services, or markets to foreign audiences (Aronczyk 2013; Meisch 2002; Nuttavuthisit 2007; Rivera 2008; Wherry 2007), and how actors attribute “cultural wealth” to different geographic regions (Bandelj and Wherry 2011), making economic decisions based in part on these interpretations (Bandelj 2003). But we still need to know how local economic practices are shaped by *global* ideas, by globally-institutionalized and circulating notions of the sacred and the profane.

Child labor is a global phenomenon: it occurs around the world and is often the result of social, political, and economic globalization (Dianopolous and Zhao 2007; Fors 2014). Activists have institutionalized an international children’s rights framework has now spread around the world (Gran 2017). 170 countries and territories have ratified the ILO Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Employment, 181 have ratified the ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, and all countries in the world but one have signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, making it the most successful international human rights instrument ever (Montgomery 2009: 6). The fight against child labor (and the movements to resist this fight) are now a global project (Boyle, Smith, and Guenther 2007).

We need to understand how culture shapes child labor in its global context, paying attention to both the globally institutionalized narratives and norms on child labor as well as the local lived experiences of working children themselves. Or, to build on Zelizer directly, we need to look at both how actors globalize the “priceless child” and how priceless children, in turn, respond. I start with the second point before turning to the first and addressing theories of cultural globalization.

Foregrounding children: The new sociology of childhood

For a long time, social scientists have studied children as “becoming” (Jenks 2005: 8), asking questions about children’s “socialization,” or “the processes by which children adapt to and internalize society” (Corsaro 2015: 7). This view often assumes a duality between children and adults, it presupposes that all adults are capable, agentic providers and that all children are incapable, passive consumers (Pugh 2014: 75). In this perspective, “the child is seen as something apart from society that must be shaped and guided by external forces to become a fully functioning member” (Corsaro 2015: 7). Proponents of this approach might see child labor as a part of a children’s gradual entry into society or as a block to children’s healthy development.

But, in the past thirty years, sociologists have developed an alternative approach to childhood. First, sociologists now talk about childhood as a “structural form,” just like class, race, or gender (Qvortrup 2009). Corsaro (2015), for instance, writes: “For children themselves, childhood is a temporary period. For society, on the other hand, childhood is a permanent structural form or category that never disappears even though its members change continuously and its nature and conception vary historically” (4). Scholars now look at how the structure of childhood intersects with class, race, or gender, providing children different constraints or opportunities (Bernstein 2011; James and Jenks 1996; Lareau 2011; Messner 2000; Pugh 2009). Scholars now ask, like Zelizer, how the meanings of this form might change (Cunningham 1992; Jenks 2005; Mintz 2004; Waites 2005).

Second, sociologists recognize that children are active, creative agents who produce and shape their social worlds in the here and now (Corsaro 2015). Children create peer cultures where they negotiate power and solidarity on their own terms (Corsaro and Eder 1990). Children interpret and enact ideas about gender, class, race, and sexuality in ways not expected and often not approved of by adults (Bhana 2016). Children grant and deny each other (and themselves) a sense of dignity and belonging (Pugh 2009). They live and act in the world in the present, not only in preparation for the adulthood of the future. Therefore, sociologists recommend “child-centric” research: to understand the lives of children we need to listen to children themselves.

Social scientists have since taken this approach to the study of child labor. Scholars have found that working children's lives are in fact more complex than cultural representations allow. Most surprisingly, many scholars have discovered that children often claim that work is their choice (Bourdillon 2007; O'Kane 2003; Ramírez Sánchez 2007; Song 1996; Wihstutz 2007).

Studies of child labor are remarkably consistent around the world. Most children work because their parents cannot afford food, rent, or medicine; because a parent has died or been injured; because their parents have separated or divorced; or because one or both parents cannot find work of their own (Bourdillon 2007; Domic Ruiz 1999; Invernizzi 2003; Ramírez Sánchez 2007; Liebel 2004; Omokhodion et al. 2006; White 2002; Wihstutz 2007). Children also work to learn, both to finance their formal schooling and to gain "life skills" like handling money, talking to strangers, and learning discipline and responsibility (Abebe and Kjorholt 2009; Bourdillon 2007; Da Silva Telles and Abramo 1987; Invernizzi 2003; Liebel 2004). And children work to gain independence, they want autonomy within their families or they have their own families to support (Da Silva Telles and Abramo 1987; Invernizzi 2008; Liebel 2004).

Scholars also show that work is a way for children to manage meaningful relationships with their families, peers, and community (Lanuza and Bandelj 2015; Zelizer 2010). Some children develop new relationships and friendships with customers or employers (Da Silva Telles and Abramo 1987; Invernizzi 2003; Liebel 2004; White 2002). Some experience work as a new space for fun, creativity, and play (Bromley and Mackie 2009). And, obviously, many like the fact that work brings money. A study of child checkout packers in Mexico, for instance, found that the children earned, on average, "twice the [national] minimum wage in tips" (Aitken et al. 2006: 366). Sometimes, although not always, child labor pays.

Child-centric studies of child labor have also shown that most children downplay the negative consequences of child labor, even though scholars themselves have seen that children who work are more likely to drop out of school or do poorly in school (Beegle, Dehejia and Gatti 2009; Huebler 2007; Ray 2009), are more likely to be injured, especially if they work in construction or

manufacturing (Ahmed 2014), tend to have less time for rest and leisure (Bromley and Mackie 2009), are more likely to be malnourished than similar children who do not work (Omokhodion and Omokhodion 2013), and are more often victims of physical or emotional abuse (Bourdillon 2007; Grugel and Ferreira 2012; Hadi 2000). What is more, work is not a choice for all working children, some children are forced to work against their will for long hours and in unsanitary conditions (Bourdillon 2007: 60). Child labor is shaped by extreme poverty, unfair labor markets, and cultural contexts where children are at the bottom of hierarchies of age (Liebel 2004: 10). And former child laborers usually do not escape these conditions; children who work tend to grow up and have children of their own who have to work as well (Emerson and Souza 2003). This is what Basu (1999) calls the “child labor trap.”

And yet many children still say they want to work, often resisting efforts to remove them from child labor (IPEC 2002: 16). Studies from Zimbabwe to Peru, from Uruguay to Germany, show that many children describe work as a *moral* choice: children say they work to “gain a sense of achievement and pride” (Bourdillon 2007: 58), to get “recognition and respect from adults” (Wihstutz 2007: 81), to “be treated with dignity and respect” (O’Kane 2003: 174), or because “the definition of a good child includes being a child that helps” (Ramírez Sánchez 2007: 93; also Song 1996). The working children who marched in Bolivia, therefore, are not the exception but, it seems, part of a broader rule: children time and again associate child labor with morality.

Most child-centric research on working children stops here, naming the moral choice. Researchers don’t examine how this choice relates to deeper structures of meaning or how this choice might draw from both global and local representations of childhood. And yet working children do not live in a vacuum, they live and work in a world steeped with moral meanings (Hungerland, Liebel, Milne, and Wihstutz 2007: 11). What is more, many of these moral meanings come from across their national borders, as the similarity of responses suggests. Once again, to understand child labor we also need to understand cultural globalization, we need to look at the many ways in which moral ideas move.

Following moral norms: Cultural brokers and cultural globalization

Cultural globalization is the circulation and diffusion of narratives, images, practices, objects, models, and moral norms (Holton 2005: 15). Social scientists have written extensively on how this culture moves: through colonialism and war, through economic pressures, through organizational modeling, coordination, and alliances, through travel and migration, and through global institutions that try to “persuade other nations of the rightness of reforms” (Halliday and Osinsky 2006: 451; see also Braithwaite and Drahos 2000; Dobbin, Simmons, and Garrett 2007; Levitt 2016). Moral norms against child labor have traveled mostly through this last avenue (Gran 2017). The more nation-states join transnational networks, the more they participate in international organizations, the more likely it is that they will adopt a certain model of the state (Lechner and Boli 2005; Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997). International organizations like the UN or the ILO codify and institutionalize a specific idea of what the state is, what it should be, what goals it should pursue, what procedures it should follow, what it owes its citizens, and what it owes its children (Meyer 2010). That is why, Boli and Meyer (1978) write, “as the ideological legitimation of the state expands, so do rules distinguishing children as a status groups under state jurisdiction” (809). In their studies of national constitutions, Boli and Meyer find that countries adopt certain rules regarding children in waves, not as the result of local activism or political changes but because “states pursue progress within [a global] agreed-upon frame” (810).

Now, states sometimes adopt global models and norms in theory but not in practice. States sign conventions but fail to uphold them, pass laws but fail to enforce them, support causes and global norms but fail to fund the necessary projects and organizations (Cole and Ramirez 2013; Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2005, 2007; Schofer and Hironaka 2005). In his review on the globalization of children’s rights, Gran (2017) finds that the “international framework of children’s rights has not overcome barriers to extending children’s rights into the family home” (25.18). But scholars have also shown that even if a state only supports a norm on paper, this allows social

movements, NGOs, and local actors to pressure the state and therefore create real change in the long run (Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2005). Qualitative researchers are now turning their attention to those cultural brokers. They ask *how* different actors try to bring global models and norms to local communities, how they try to turn global theory into local practice. Research on cultural brokers – or intermediaries (Kaufman and Patterson 2005) or vernacularizers (Levitt and Merry 2009) or translators (Jijon forthcoming) – reconstructs the process of translation and studies “not only [...] the ‘diffusion of culture’ (or religion, ideas or technology) but [...] diffusion as a cultural act” (Levitt and Merry 2009: 444).

Cultural brokers carry moral norms from international organizations to local communities. These translators are in fact “chains of actors [that] stretch from the sites of the global production [...] to localities where ordinary people around the world adopt them” (Levitt and Merry 2009: 447). They are “people in between” who need to understand several different cultural languages (449). They hold positions of both vulnerability and power, they “control the flow of information back and forth” but they are also “open to suspicion, envy and mistrust. Both sides wonder where the translator’s loyalties lie” (449).

Cultural translators carry models and norms in “packages,” in bundles of stories, images, and standardized or exemplary scripts (Levitt and Merry 2009; Tsing 2005). For instance, the package of “women’s rights” contains, “loosely coupled, roughly analogous elements such as gender equality, valuing autonomy in marriage and divorce choices, an emphasis on women’s empowerment, and a secular concern with political and economic status” (Levitt and Merry 2009: 445). The broader neo-liberal package “promotes democracy, capitalism, human rights, the rule of law, transparency, accountability and gender equality” (447). Or the fundamentalist religious package includes “gender complementarity, tradition, conservatism and authority” (447). Actors in international organizations assemble these packages through extensive negotiation, imposition, and compromising (Ancelevici and Jenson 2013; Merry 2006, 2016). Cultural brokers translate these packages to make them intelligible in the local community.

So far, studies on cultural brokers have focused on how these actors carry these moral packages and how these actors' social location influences the transfer. Liu, Hu, and Liao (2009), for instance, look at how a translator's *institutional position* shapes her work. In their research of the globalization of women's rights to China, these authors find that when brokers are associated to the government or government-adjacent organizations, they placed the global package squarely within the national legal framework. In contrast, when brokers work for organizations not related to the government, they bring with them international ideas about law and promote legal reform. Mujica and Mesa (2009) study the importance of a cultural broker's *ideological position*. They compare how two organizations bring the language of women's rights to under-privileged women in Peru, the first a Catholic liberation theology organization, the second a feminist group. Kaufman and Patterson (2005) look at actors' *social position*. In their study of the spread of cricket to English colonies and former colonies, they find that where cultural brokers are located in the social hierarchy and how secure they are in their social position influences whether they capture or promote the imported practice.

In general, scholars have found that cultural brokers are more effective when they have ties to the local culture. In her study on how Sesame Street became a successful children's show around the world, Kay (2012) argues that at least part of the reason this media conglomerate has been able to adapt its programming to a variety of local cultures and address often taboo social issues is because it negotiates entry with local partners and co-produces most of its content. Kay writes that this coproduction model "is unique among organizations engaged in transnational work because it is based on creating a local team of experts that chooses themes and curricula for its coproduction and outreach projects. Although they are subject to certain restrictions and oversight, partners have tremendous freedom to shape their projects."

Cultural brokers also use a series of different strategies to mediate global norms with local culture. Levitt and Merry (2009) find that, around the world, "people who appropriate and vernacularize globally circulating ideas, as well as the clients they hope to reach, often think of the

world in dichotomous categories such as good/bad, moral/ immoral, and sacred/secular” (451). Translators must work with these local binaries in order to make their translation intelligible. Their main difficulty, however, is that they walk a fine line: If they accommodate the new package too much, it loses its transformative power, it doesn’t add anything new to the local community. If they don’t accommodate the package enough it never enters the local community, it will be unintelligible or simply too foreign, therefore losing any chance of making an impact (447). Merry (2006) discuss different ways cultural brokers add local cultural elements to these foreign packages to make them more familiar, for instance:

Representatives from an Australian Aboriginal group dealing with violence against women displayed a brochure they had developed for battered women that was richly decorated with the swirls and spots of Aboriginal art. They drew on the artistic traditions of Aboriginal peoples to tailor information about how to seek help for battering in a way that might appeal to other Aboriginal women (10).

Kay (2012) speaks more of negotiation processes, and gives the example of cultural brokers giving up on a “core value” in order to reach their desired goal:

In Kosovo, negotiations over the terms of adoption forced SW [Sesame Workshop] to reconsider a core value – using the alphabet to teach literacy. Albanians and Serbians could not agree on a common alphabet (either Latin or Cyrillic). In addition to the language issue, partners did not want to shoot scenes with children from each group playing together because parents would not allow their children to watch an ethnically-integrated program. Although the problem could have killed the project, SW and their local partners negotiated an innovative solution; they developed a “visual dictionary” that featured children holding objects such as sunglasses and saying their corresponding words in different languages.

In all of these examples, cultural brokers work to fit global norms with local cultural contexts, either reconciling both or challenging the latter. Sometimes brokers then bring local ideas back to the global, for instance indigenous activists in Latin America carried notions about collective organization back to the more individual-focused United Nations (Brysk 2000). Tsutsui (2017) calls this the “local-global feedback loop” between local social movements and global institutions.

But cultural brokers, as we have seen, are not always effective: local actors sometimes resist global norms (Halliday and Osinsky 2006: 448). Boyle (2002) studies how some people

oppose laws and NGOs prohibiting female genital cutting (FGC) in Egypt. She argues that “resistance is much more powerful when the institutions contradict principles (Islam) or practices (FGC) in *alternative* meaning systems [alternative to the human rights doctrine]. The most effective resistance to FGC reform efforts occurs in locations where alternative meaning systems are well developed and legitimated” (9). Similarly, Mujica and Mesa (2009) show that many poor, indigenous women in Lima contest the aspects of women’s rights that emphasized individual autonomy; they draw on local Andean traditions that gave more value to community rights. As Levitt and Merry (2009) put it: “Values packages land on and bounce off particular geographies rutted by history and culture” (455).

But this, I believe, is only *part* of the reason why local actors resist global norms. These explanations risk falling back into a folk, zero-sum logic that misrepresents culture, into a simplistic global vs. local binary. Instead, I propose we complicate our understanding of cultural brokers and their work. We need to stop talking about how actors carry or transmit global meaning, we need to explore how they interpret, decode, and construct it.

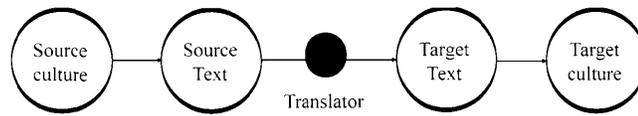
Drawing on previous work discussing translation theory (Jijon forthcoming), I propose that we take a closer look at the global norms themselves. If norms travel in “value packages,” than how are these packages constructed? Deconstructed? Reconstructed in the local context? How might the different elements of the package itself contribute to understandings or misunderstandings or alternative interpretations of a norm? In the next section, I introduce the idea of intertextuality (Allen 2000). Because to understand how global norms shape child labor – or how local actors might reject these global norms – we need to recognize that global norms always have several, paradoxical, unstable meanings.

Introducing intertextuality: The many meanings of global norms

Research on cultural brokers has shown how actors carry global norms into the local context. But this literature has largely focused on the “transmissibility” of culture (Bielsa 2014:

402). Most studies overlook linguistic translation (Kuipers 2015 and Tsing 2005 are notable exceptions). And even when scholars do consider this process, they often think of it as a “mere technical question” (Bielsa 2014:11) where actors must change surface elements of a text – the words, the sounds, the grammar, the syntax – leaving the deeper content of the original intact. Kelly (1979) calls this an “instrumental model of translation,” one that “[assumes] that translation is essentially transmission of data” (34). Figure 1. is an illustration of this model (Venuti 2010).

Figure 1. The instrumental model of translation



But Kelly and others propose an alternative “hermeneutic model of translation,” (1979: 34). For Venuti (2010), this second model “treats translation as an interpretation of the source text, whose form, meaning, and effect are [...] variable, subject to inevitable transformation” (6). The question stops being whether or not cultural brokers convincingly communicate global norms to a local audience. Rather, the question becomes what do these norms mean to these particular brokers and in this particular context. The meanings of global norms are suddenly open, fluid, in question. Cultural brokers no longer carry meanings, they capture, condense, and create them.

Fig. 2 The hermeneutic model of translation

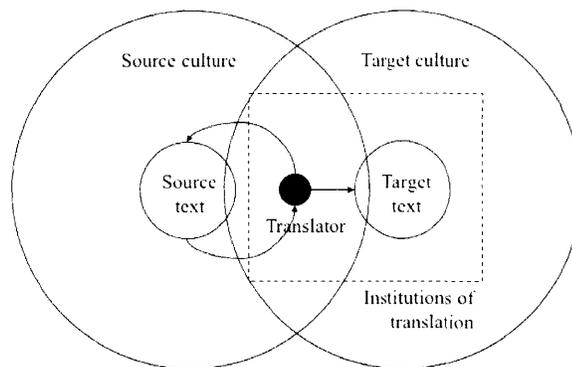


Figure 2. is my interpretation of the hermeneutic model. I combine insights from both the research on cultural brokers and translation theory. In this diagram, as Levitt and Merry (2009) note, the cultural broker is caught between global institutions – the source culture – and the local community – the target culture (449; see also Sapiro 2013; Tymoczko 2010). The broker is also part of an organization with a particular institutional, ideological, and social position (Kaufman and Patterson 2005; Liu, Hu, Liao 2009; Mujica and Mesa 2009; see also Hermans 1991; Simeoni 1998; Toury 2012). And the target text is enmeshed in the target culture: translators try to adapt global norms to make them intelligible but also transformative in the local context (Levitt and Merry 2009: 447). The translator brings global norms and can either reinforce or challenge the audience's expectations (Venuti 2010 [1993]: 69).

What the hermeneutic model adds to theories of cultural brokers is that it recognizes that the source text is *also* enmeshed in the source culture, that it also draws from a wide set of references, representations, and histories. Cultural brokers must choose one among many possible readings of a global norm, one among many possible ways of interpreting the source text. Venuti writes that, in this model, the text is not a “self-consistent container” but a dynamic “signifying process” (Venuti 2010: 22, emphasis added). Just as cultural brokers strategize and work to fit a global norm in the local context, they strategize and work to pry the global norm out of the global context in the first place.

Venuti (2010) reminds us that texts create meaning through at least two different levels: the *intra-textual level*, or the words, sounds, grammar, syntax, and tropes of the text; and the *inter-textual or inter-discursive level*, or the text's references to other discourses, narratives, symbols, or genres (22; see also Allen 2000; Hermans 2010 [1996]; Ye 2004 [1994]). I argue that research on cultural brokers has mostly focused on a norm's *intra-textuality*, on how these change its language, its presentation, or its format. I propose that we must also look at a norm's *inter-textual* links, at the ways it aligns with, contrasts to, draws from, and is informed by other globally-circulating norms and representations. In this view, cultural brokers do more than rewrite, rebrand, or re-

present. They must also contend with the collective beliefs, narratives, archetypes, or genres that inform a circulating norm (Hermans 2010 [1996]). They must translate, as Ye (2004 [1993]) succinctly puts it, the many “texts within a text” (82).

Translators can contend with this intertextuality in several ways. Some might try to find all a texts’ links and references and explain them to the local audience. Campos (2003) calls this “cultural pedagogy” (62), Appiah (2012 [1993]) calls this “thick translation.” The aim is to “locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context” (341). Other translators, in contrast, are less “faithful” to the source text. Nietzsche (2012 [1882]), for instance, wrote about how intellectuals during the French Revolution appropriated Roman poetry, disregarding its inter-textual links, inventing new ones, “[striking] out the name of the poet and [replacing] it with one’s own” (68). The intellectuals changed the meaning of Roman poetry by willfully ignoring its original context.

But often things get “lost in translation” not out of malice, ignorance, or indolence but because texts can, in fact, be read in several different ways. Lefevere (1992), for example, argues that the work of Madame de Staël “can be shown to have been rewritten in pro- or anti-Napoleon and pro- or anti-German during the French Second and Third Republics” (9). Bourdieu is right that in cultural globalization, texts “circulate without their context” (Bourdieu 1999:221). But we cannot forget that translators must nonetheless contend with the original context in some way. In this process, translators make choices that shift the meaning of the source text.

In short, this dissertation challenges the assumption that global norms have a clear, singular meaning. It challenges the idea that global norms simply clash into, compete against, and try to replace local norms and representations. I argue instead that global norms and representations – like minimum age standards and representations of the priceless child – are also read and understood in relation to one another and to other globally-circulating, globally-institutionalized, globally-legitimated texts. I Bolivia changed its child labor laws not because of something particular to Bolivia – Bolivia is not unlike several other states on the global periphery – but because minimum age standards can be interpreted as either compatible or incompatible with children’s

rights more broadly. Therefore, if we want to understand how global norms influence the law and practice of child labor, then we must first understand that global norms are an open “signifying process” Venuti 2010: 22). We must first understand global norms’ intertextuality.

Dissertation roadmap

This dissertation addresses three questions: (1) What are the possible meanings of global norms against child labor? (2) How do cultural brokers interpret and transform these norms? And (3) How do local audiences – in this case working children – then read and adapt to these many translations? By answering these questions, I answer my bigger research query: How do global norms influence child labor?

After a short chapter on background information on Bolivia and my research methods (chapter 2), chapter 3 answers the first question. I review the history and global reception of global norms against child labor, paying special attention to the ILO Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Employment (C138). Drawing on secondary sources and the text itself, I show that this convention does in fact have several meanings and has always been interpreted by different actors in contradictory ways. Therefore, as C138 spreads around the world, translators need to contend with its many meanings, with what I call its *cultural, institutional, and textual baggage*.

Chapters 4 and 5 address the second question: how do actors translate and perform C138. In chapter 4, I compare the ways international organizations, children’s rights NGOs, working children’s unions, and the Bolivian state justify their different positions towards child labor. I show that they disagree less than the actors believe; all actors want to ensure the dignity of working children. They do disagree on the morality of street work and minimum age laws. I argue that this is because they each have different expectations about what a good translation looks like, different underlying ideas about culture, law, moral arguments, and the world. Interestingly, they all hold similar views of childhood, they all defend their position towards C138 – for, against, or ambiguous – by citing not only local cultural norms but also and more often the UN Convention on the Rights

of the Child. The difference is that each group gives some parts of this convention more weight than others: On the one hand, members of international organizations, some NGOs, and some members of government focus on children's *protection rights*. They approach questions of child labor by asking how to best protect children from harm. On the other hand, members of other NGOs, other members of government, and UNATSBO emphasize children's *participation rights*. They approach child labor by saying we should listen to working children.

Chapter 5 reconstructs how working children managed to convince the Bolivian government to listen to their interpretation of C138 as opposed to the translations put forth by international organizations and some children rights NGOs. I show how UNATSBO had been lobbying the government for a long time with little effect, how the government was initially committed to keeping the minimum age for employment at fourteen. All this changed, however, when the working children marched and were repressed by the Bolivian police. At this moment, UNATSBO leaders embodied not a particular, local image of childhood but the globally-institutionalized, sacred, priceless view of childhood: they were vulnerable, innocent children being oppressed by polluting adults. Members of civil society amplified this interpretation and spread this reading of the event. This this interpretation, in turn, earned UNATSBO a seat at the negotiating table and the attention of President Evo Morales himself. Ironically, the organized working children managed to convince the state to oppose one international convention by successfully embodying an international image of childhood.

Chapter 6 covers the third question: how working children navigate the different translations in their midst. I show that working children do not choose one narrative over another, they do not simply subscribe to UNATSBO's translation as opposed to the translations of international organizations. Rather, working children bend the moral stories told by the international organizations and NGOs to make their work more compatible with global stories about the pricelessness of childhood.

Chapter 7 is the dissertation's conclusion. Here I discuss the theoretical implications of this work. I will show how the hermeneutic model of translation adds not only to theories of cultural globalization but also studies in the cultural sociology of markets and the new sociology of childhood. I conclude with a few policy recommendations with regards to child labor in particular. I show different ways in which the different cultural brokers might stop talking past each other but rather to each other, by understanding the underlying assumptions they carry.

Chapter two: Case study and methods

The case

There are two reasons why studying narratives of child labor in Bolivia will tell us something about child labor and cultural globalization more broadly: Bolivia is both an extremely uncommon and an extremely common case.

First, Bolivia is uncommon. Bolivia is the first country in the world to lower the minimum age for employment, going against the global diffusion of the ILO Convention No. 138. While other countries may have unclear minimum age specifications, may have minimum age standards that do not apply to all forms of work, may have not even signed C138 at all (as we will see in chapter three, this has always been a controversial convention), Bolivia is still the first country to openly oppose it. Bolivia is the first country to change its law and write an exception to the norm for children as young as ten. Bolivia is the first country to defend this choice in Geneva in front of ILO members. Bolivia's new law, in other words, has brought the issue of child labor back into the public sphere. It has forced the different actors who work on this issue to articulate, defend, and justify their positions, creating a cycle of reflexivity that still reverberates years later. It offers a unique opportunity to see how cultural brokers translate C138 in the first place.

Second, Bolivia is deceptively common. Bolivia's economic, political, structural, and cultural conditions made the new law possible. But several other countries share similar structures and have *not* changed their law. Take, for example, Bolivia's economic conditions. Bolivia is the poorest country in South America, its GDP (purchasing power parity) in 2015 was 74.58 billion dollars (World Bank 2016), and Bolivia has one of the highest rates of child labor in the region, 20.2% of children ages 7 to 14, almost 388,541 children, are involved in a practice that falls under the ILO's definition of the worst forms of child labor, especially hazardous activities in agriculture, mining, and street work (US DOL 2016), and almost 850,000 children are involved in all forms of child labor (UCOMTEMPS 2017). However, in Cameroon, more than half of all children are

engaged in child labor (US DOL 2016). And in India, the percentage is small but the absolute number of children is higher: 3,253,202 children between 5 and 14 (US DOL 2016). Only in Latin America there are two other countries with higher percentages of children in the worst forms of labor and six with more children in absolute numbers than Bolivia (see Table 1). And yet, these countries have not changed their child labor laws.

Table 1. *Estimates of children in child labor in Latin America*

Country	Children in the worst forms of child labor	Ages considered	Source year	
Working children over 10%				
Haiti	34.4%	815,993	5-14	2012
Nicaragua	31.1%	218,829	10-14	2010
Bolivia	20.2%	388,541	7-14	2009
Peru	19.4%	1,014,688	6-14	2011
Guatemala	19.2%	597,561	7-14	2012
Paraguay	15.3%	113,072	10-14	2005
Working children b/w 5-10%				
Honduras	7.8%	153,536	5-14	2013
Argentina	6.5%	395,869	5-14	2011
El Salvador	6.3%	84,927	5-14	2011
Uruguay	6.1%	31,955	5-14	2009
Colombia	5.9%	514,093	5-14	2012
Dominican Republic	5.3%	54,850	5-14	2011
Venezuela	5.1%	138,641	10-14	2006
Working children under 5%				
Costa Rica	4.4%	34,494	5-14	2011
Chile	3.8%	94,025	5-14	2012
Panama	3.7%	25,545	5-14	2012
Brazil	3.5%	1,116,499	5-14	2011
Ecuador	2.7%	75,689	5-14	2011
Mexico	2.3%	205,553	5-13	2013

Source (Diallo, Etienne, & Mehran, 2013), (US DOL, 2016), and (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía INEGI, 2014)

Similarly, Bolivia's political conditions allowed for the new child labor law. Bolivia's government has been restructured since the 2006 election of Evo Morales (Morales 2011). Morales won the presidency with an unprecedented electoral majority, allowing him not only to control Congress and the Senate but to rewrite the constitution in 2009 (Harten 2013). Morales'

government is a reaction to previous leaders that acquiesced to international organizations and global powers, that led the country to political, economic, and social crises. Morales has essentially made his career by taking a hard, anti-globalist stance. To give only a few examples: Morales first political act was to oppose the United States' attempts to eliminate coca plantations in Bolivia, calling this an imperialistic attack on the local culture and economy (71). Morales also cited imperialism when, as President, he expelled foreign gas and oil companies (Azcuí 2006). Under Morales' tenure, Bolivia refused aid from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (Singham 2015), did not join the Free Trade Area of the Americas (Sivak 2010), and became the first country to leave the International Center for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (Farthing & Kohl 2014). The new, controversial child labor law is clearly part of a trend.

But, again, in this Bolivia is not that exceptional. If it were only a matter of resisting imperialism, why is Bolivia the first country to change its child labor laws? There have been several other anti-imperialistic leaders in Latin America alone. Cuba's Fidel and Raul Castro, Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, Ecuador's Rafael Correa, Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega have all denounced states from the global core and international organizations as much as Bolivia. None of these countries, however, has ever challenged global child labor norms. What is more, Bolivia only "resisted" globalization in this one point in particular – the minimum age – not in all other laws regarding childhood or all other laws regarding the labor. Bolivia's law No. 548 still upholds globally institutionalized ideas about the worst forms of child labor, children's education, and children's rights for rest and leisure, complicating our understanding of "failed" or "successful" globalization.

Structurally, Bolivia is located on the global periphery. We know that the more connected a state is to transnational networks and institutions, the more likely that state will adopt certain laws and policies (Boli & Elliott 2008; Lechner and Boli 2008; Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997; Meyer 2000; Meyer 2010). Bolivia is not as connected to the "world polity" as other states, it hasn't had as much support from NGOs and international experts. What is more, Morales has had an outright antagonistic stance towards NGOs. In 2008, Morales expelled USAID from the country

after learning that this organization had provided more than \$4.5 billion USD to his political opponents (Farthing and Kohl 2014). Bolivia's government has also instituted extensive government oversight over national and international organizations. This has what many international delegates have called a "hostile environment" towards NGOs.

But if we count the number of NGOs that are in the country, or the number of conventions that Bolivia has signed, or the number of international conferences that Bolivia has attended, then we see that Bolivia, once again, is not that strange. In 2014, the Union of International Associations ranked Bolivia 74 out of 279 countries when quantifying a state's participation in international organizations (55). The association also ranked Bolivia 87 out of 241 in its participation in intergovernmental organizations (57). And it ranked Bolivia 74 out of 279 in its participation in international nongovernmental organizations (59). Only in the Americas, there are 52 countries and territories with less NGOs than Bolivia (62). And, again, Bolivia is not rejecting all global norms, not even all the global norms regarding to children. The new law only opposes one specific convention, C138.

Finally, even Bolivia's cultural conditions are not rare. Morales wants to rhetorically reclaim traditional, indigenous cultural, political, and economic practices and adapt them to the modern, global, capitalist context (Stefanoni 2007). In 2009, after extensive political struggle, Bolivia rewrote its constitution, "refounding" the nation as a Plurinational state that recognizes its many indigenous communities (Loayza 2011). The new constitution reconciles "traditional indigenous values" with the global discourse of human rights. In this way, the government wanted to symbolically redistribute power which has been held by European descendants over the majority Amerindian population since the Spanish colonization of the Americas (Harten 2013).

And in this context the government updated its many laws, including its laws pertaining childhood. In traditional Aymara and Quechuan communities, children are very much members of the family economic unit, they help planting and harvesting family and communal plots, they look after small animals, siblings, and older relatives, and they participate in communal public projects

like paving streets or hosting festivals or selling in local markets (Harten 2013 35). Children are also taught the three principles of Andean indigenous communities: “Ama llulla, ama suwa, ama qhilla,” or “do not lie, do not steal, and do not be idle” (Loayza 2011 82). Evo Morales himself was a working child. Morales has publically stated that he herded llamas at age four and has encouraged his children to do the same (Agencia EFE 2013). Child labor, it would seem, has a distinct meaning in Bolivia that is incompatible with international standards.

And yet – and there is always an “and yet” – if we look at the Bolivian case more closely we find that the story is much messier. When the government began updating its childhood law, legislators weren’t originally interested in changing the laws on child labor. And not only was Morales fine with keeping the minimum age for work at 14, he even encouraged Congress and the Senate to pass the new law quickly so that it could be his “Christmas gift to the children of Bolivia” (La Razón 2013). These powerful gatekeepers changed their mind in reaction to the working children’s march. But why, if working children have so little political influence? This group has little to no political, economic, or social power. And why now, since working children had been marching and protesting for years without ever gaining any real attention from politicians, much less the President? Local cultural ideas about work and about childhood are clearly part of the story but, as this case shows, they are not the whole story.

This is what my dissertation aims to explain: why here, why now, why in this way? I do so with the help of translation and performance theory. Following the maxims of cultural sociology, I “dig into culture as a structure of meaning, [...] think closely about contingency and performance, [and] look not for hidden roots of belief but at the blindingly obvious ways that culture plays out in the visible activity of the public sphere” (Smith and Howe 2015). Specifically, I look at how different actors in the public sphere represent and justify arguments about child labor. Bolivia is a useful case for what Hall (1999) calls “analytic generalization”: where “evidence from case-comparative or variable-analytic research is used to elaborate and test hypotheses” (193). Because Bolivia is relatively unexceptional, this case allows us to “hold constant” variables such as the

economic, political, cultural conditions, as well as its embeddedness in transnational networks, and see what else had to occur for Bolivia to reject the minimum age for employment, what was the spark that put the ensuing events in motion. This “black swan case” (Flyvbjerg 2006: 228) lets us see what else matters in the globalization, or failed globalization, of moral norms. (For more general information about Bolivia, see Table 2).

Table 2. *Socio-demographic profile of Bolivia*

Demographic profile	
Ethnicity	
Total population (2016 estimate)	10,969,649
Mestizo (mixed white and Amerindian ancestry).....	68%
Amerindian.....	20%
White.....	5%
Cholo/ Chola (mixed white and Amerindian ancestry) ³	2%
Black.....	1%
Other.....	1%
Unspecified.....	3%
Language	
Spanish.....	60.7%
Quechua.....	21.2%
Aymara.....	14.6%
Foreign languages.....	2.4%
Guarani.....	0.6%
Other indigenous languages.....	0.4%
Religion	
Roman Catholic.....	76.8%
Evangelical and Pentecostal.....	8.1%
Protestant.....	7.9%
Other.....	1.7%
None.....	5.5%
Urbanization	
Urban population.....	69.3%

Source: (CIA, 2016)

³ According to the CIA Factbook, in Bolivia “the use of ‘mestizo’ and ‘cholo’ varies among response choices in surveys, with surveys using the terms interchangeably, providing one or the other as a response choice, or providing the two as separate response choices” (CIA, 2016).

The methods

In order to study public narratives of child labor – how actors defend or criticize the minimum age for employment – I use a series of qualitative methods: interviews, focus groups, ethnographic observations, and document analysis. I conducted this research from January to December 2016. In total, I spoke with 112 children and adults and collected over 1000 written documents.

Adult interviews

The first set of interviews was with adult translators, representatives from international organizations, international and national children’s rights NGOs, the Bolivian Union of Working Children and Adolescents (UNATSBO), and the Bolivian government. This first set of interviews inform chapters four and five. I used snowball sampling with multiple starting points in order to get as wide a sample as possible (Noy 2008). I conducted 48 semi-structured interviews in Spanish or English, per the interviewee’s request.

The interviews took place wherever the interviewee chose: in offices, coffeehouses, service centers, or parks. I conducted most of the interviews in La Paz although I also pursued some in Cochabamba and Potosi, following the snowball. I asked open-ended questions about each interviewee’s specific work, experiences with working children and child labor, and opinions about child labor more broadly, for instance what they think the minimum age for employment should be or where should we draw the line between acceptable work and unacceptable labor. I followed Kvale’s advice that interview research should be “attuned to who is being traveled with, so to speak” and not just “setting out a precise route for all to follow” (Warren 2002).

The interviews ranged from thirty minutes to two hours long, most approximating an hour and a half. The interviews were mostly relaxed and conversational, both the interviewees and I laughed often. Sometimes, however, interviewees became impassioned and even angry, especially

when they discussed a position towards child labor contrary to their own, what they viewed as an outrageous argument.

Fifteen interviewees asked to remain anonymous (See Table 1A in Appendix). Most of these interviewees were worried of getting themselves or their organization in trouble for talking to me, citing the current government's intolerance of dissent. This was especially true for members of international organizations or NGOs. They also didn't want their words to be taken as the official stance of their organization.

Scholars have noted some problems with the interview method, mainly that it only allows researchers to get to personal justifications instead of "real" facts, to post-hoc rationalizations instead of "true" motivations (Martin 2010). But in this dissertation I am interested precisely in justifications and rationalizations, I want to "derive interpretations, not facts or laws, from respondent talk" (Warren 2002: 83). Interviews allow me to study how people reconstruct events in the past in relation to broader cultural expectations (85). They allow me to look at patterns in a group of transnational informants as opposed to patterns in a specific setting (85). In this dissertation, I follow Pugh's (2013) dictum that in-depth interviews help us to get to people's perception of and emotions toward their social world. The aim of this research is to examine the stories people tell themselves in order to feel good or bad about child labor

Pugh (2013) writes that in-depth interviews provide four types of data: the honorable, the schematic, the visceral, and meta-feelings (43). In this dissertation, I draw on all four, with special focus on the first and last. By "the honorable," Pugh means that "interviewees frame their answers to present themselves in the most admirable light, actively conducting a form of display work" (50). This data, Pugh argues, shows us each interviewee's "sense of what counts as honorable behavior" (50), shows us what interviewees think they *should* say or think or feel, in this case about child labor. Meta-feelings, however, provide some critical distance from these expectations. This data shows "the secret shame, the defiant pride or the resigned acceptance of what people notice that they feel" (51). In other words, informants may say they hold a certain position but may appear

uncomfortable or angered or ashamed of this position, complicating and enriching the analysis. Pugh, in short, invites researchers to focus not only on what interviewees say but on how they say it (54). In this way, we can reconstruct the “landscape of meaning” that informs and helps justify people’s actions (Reed 2011: 140).

Working children focus groups

I also conducted a second set of interviews with working children and adolescents, profiled in chapter six. For this chapter only, I compare the working children’s movements in Bolivia to the movement in Ecuador, a country relatively similar to Bolivia but that has not changed its minimum age laws, therefore offering an opportunity to see how the legal context shapes the opinions of working children.

I chose small-group interviews over ethnographic observations because, as Rodriguez (2007) has argued, this method tends to give priority to the researcher’s adult-centered point of view (75). Many sociologists of childhood recommend in-depth individual or small group interviews with children in order to “allow them to give voice to their own interpretations and thoughts rather than rely solely on our adult interpretations of their lives” (Eder and Fingerson 2011: 181). Small group interviews especially allow children to feel comfortable and in control of the conversation (182). Focus groups do have problems, for instance when some participants have more influence than others and sway the conversation and other participants’ answers (Morgan 1995). But they are useful in child-centric research because they allow the researcher to somewhat counterbalance the power imbalance between researcher and child (Eder and Fingerson 2011: 182; see also Corsaro 2015: 50).

I chose to compare working children in Bolivia to those in Ecuador because both countries are Andean nations with similar colonial histories, a similarly influential indigenous tradition,⁴ and, at the time of the research, similar anti-imperialistic, populist presidents who have been in power for the past decade (Kennemore and Weeks 2011). However, in Ecuador, only 2.7% of children are engaged in child labor, while in Bolivia 20.2% of children ages 7 to 14 work (US DOL 2016). Bolivia is also a poorer nation. While Bolivia's economy has grown more than Ecuador's in the last few years, its GDP (purchasing power parity) in 2015 was 74.58 billion dollars. In Ecuador, it was 184.2 billion dollars (World Bank 2016). However, the two nations provide a good comparison case: they are similar but they have opposite institutional frameworks with regards to child labor. Ecuador's government has invested heavily in programs designed to eliminate child labor (El Telégrafo 2014). Bolivia, in contrast, has few official programs addressing this issue.

The Bolivian Union of Working Children and Adolescents, UNATSBO, was formed in 2003. It has local chapters in seven of Bolivia's nine departments, and has successfully lobbied the government before, convincing legislators to make the wording of the 2009 Constitution more respectful towards working children (Yu 2016: 22). In contrast, the organization Ecuador Virtue and Strength of Working Children and Adolescents, or ECUAVYFNATs,⁵ started in 2013, only operates in Quito, and has yet to attempt any civil disobedience. These are two extremes within the variety of working children's movements (Flyvbjerg 2006).

I interviewed 64 working children and adolescents – 38 in Bolivia and 26 in Ecuador – all members of their respective working children's movement. I chose the interview method in order to “allow [children] to give voice to their own interpretations and thoughts rather than rely solely on our adult interpretations of their lives” (Eder and Fingerson 2001: 181). Because research with children and adolescents is characterized by a power imbalance between researcher and subject,

⁴ A much larger percentage of Bolivians than Ecuadorians self-identify as indigenous – 62,2% and 7%, respectively (Infolatam 2014) – but the indigenous population in Ecuador has been the best organized in the region, holding great influence over the country's politics and culture (Mijeski and Beck 2011).

⁵ *Ecuador Virtud y Fortaleza de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes Trabajadores.*

sociologists of childhood recommend interviewing children with a small group of their peers in a setting that children know well and feel comfortable in (Corsaro 2015: 50). Therefore, I conducted the interviews in groups of three or four children at a time, at the foundations that support the working children's movement, in sessions that lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. In one third of the cases, I was able to interview the same group of children twice. All of the interviews were conducted in Spanish.

In Bolivia, I spoke to children in La Paz, Cochabamba, and Potosí. In Ecuador, I only spoke to children in Quito. I asked open-ended questions about their lives, their work experiences, and their participation in the working children's movements. And, like with the adults, I asked their opinions on child labor, about the minimum age and acceptable and unacceptable labor. The participants were between 7 and 18 years old, 33 girls and 31 boys. All of the names presented here are pseudonyms chosen by the participants themselves (See Table 2A and 3A in Appendix). I also attended conferences, workshops, and presentations held by the working children's movements in order to see children's participation in practice.

Given that working children are a difficult to access population, I only spoke to children recruited by UNATSBO or ECUAVYFNATs' representatives, obtaining written consent from both the children themselves and a parent or guardian. Therefore, the interviewees are not representative of all working children in Bolivia and Ecuador or even of all children in these movements. However, these interviews allow us to propose new theoretical propositions regarding this largely understudied population.

Document analysis

To complement the information I gathered talking to people, I also collected 874 newspaper articles that mentioned child labor (summarized in Table 3). I used Google's Advanced Search function, I looked for "child labor," "working child," and "working children" ("trabajo infantil," "niño trabajador" and "niños trabajadores") in the website of 16 Bolivian newspapers in

the last 10 years. Additionally, I collected and coded all the material interviewees shared with me – over 200 books, pamphlets, reports, research summaries, contracts, publicity, brochures, photographs, organizational newspapers, etc. I also wrote fieldnotes of the meetings, conferences, and workshops I was invited to attend and of the interactions with interviewees before and after the interviews.

Table 3. *Newspaper data*

Newspaper	City	Articles on "child labor"	Online articles available since...
Bolivia			
Cambio	La Paz	8	2012
El Diario	La Paz	89	2010
La Jornada	La Paz	31	2008
La Prensa	La Paz	40	2001
La Razón	La Paz	160	2001
Página Siete	La Paz	116	2001
Correo del Sur	Sucre	12	2010
Los Tiempos	Cochabamba	25	2002
Opinión	Cochabamba	101	2011
La Patria	Oruro	55	2006
El Deber	Santa Cruz	34	2000
El Día	Santa Cruz	56	2009
La Estrella del Oriente	Santa Cruz	55	2007
El País	Tarija	44	2010
El Periódico	Tarija	6	2014
Nuevo Sur	Tarija	42	2013
Total		874	

Limitations

This research has limitations. I was not able to talk to two key actors whom other interviewees mentioned often. One is Javier Zavaleta, the Bolivian legislator in charge of the new childhood law. I met him in a conference held in Paraguay by the Latin American movement, MOLACNATs, where he agreed to an interview at a later date. However, he then ignored multiple emails and phone calls and other interviewees explained that he had faced a lot of backlash for his opinions of the law, leading him to avoid discussing the topic. The second person is Pedro Mamani,

a former UNATSBO leader who then became an adult collaborator, fought with other adult allies, and formed a splinter group called the Independent UNATSBO (“*UNATSBO Independiente*”). Mamani also initially agreed to be interviewed but then rescheduled several times and eventually stopped answering my phone calls. Therefore, my discussion of UNATSBO Independiente here comes from the “official” UNATSBO’s perspective, necessarily skewing the picture to one side.

Another limitation is that often the interviews became discussions of how the law changed in the past, they show people’s retrospective reconstructions of an event rather than their interpretations as it is unfolding. Interviewees’ opinions have certainly been shaped by the fact that they now know the event’s outcome. Also, due to time and resource restraints, I focus only on the working children’s movements in La Paz, Cochabamba, and Potosi. That being said, this is also what interviewees recommended, I did not encounter anyone who suggested I speak with someone in Santa Cruz or Oruro.

Finally, I was not able to speak to working children and adolescents engaged in the worst forms of work – although many of my interviewees work below the age of 14 and several work on the streets, none is in construction, mining, brickmaking, sugar-cane or hazelnut plantations. The twin issues here are safety and access. These populations are hard to find and when found, parents often don’t consent to their being interviewed. I met with a foundation that supports children in brickmaking but they were unable to get parental permission for the interviews. And talking to a researcher, even for a dissertation, might put these children at risk. Therefore, I make no claims to be discussing the experience of all working children, only working children in the urban informal market, often in street work.

The analysis

After collecting the interview and documentary data, I transcribed and hired a transcription service to transcribe the audios, preserving the naturalness of the conversation but also making it legible as a written text (McLellan, Macqueen, and Neidig 2003: 65). We included all the “elisions,

mispronunciations, slang, grammatical errors, nonverbal sounds (e.g., laughs, sighs), and background noises” possible (66). I then coded a subset of interviews using what Corbin and Strauss call “open-coding,” looking for “the ideas and meaning that are contained in raw data” (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, and McCulloch 2011: 139). After that I build a code-book, using both theory- and data-driven codes (137; see also Weston 2001). I returned and re-transcribed all the interviews to make sure I had not overlooked any code (139).

Coding allows researchers to simplify, expand, or make connections between data or between data and theory (138). It allowed me to see how interviewees spoke about child labor, explained Bolivia’s new childhood law, discussed international organizations and conventions, and understood work, childhood, and culture. The final code-book had 111 first-level codes that I then clustered into 20 second-level, analytic codes. From this data, I write the empirical chapters 4, 5, and 6 and reconstruct the narratives of child labor on the global periphery.

Chapter three: Globalizing the priceless child

What were the organized working children in Bolivia protesting, exactly? What does Bolivia's new law reject? The short answer is the ILO Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (or C138). The longer, more accurate answer is Convention 138, given its relationship to background cultural narratives, foreground institutional logics, and neighboring international declarations and conventions.

In this chapter, I summarize the history and many potential meanings of C138. In this way, I outline how people's ideas about the boundary between legitimate and illegitimate work have changed over time even within international organizations. This is the international framework in which working children work, these are the global representations that the working children in Bolivia are trying to change. And part of the reason they can is because these representations have multiple, often contradictory meanings.

C138, like all international conventions – is intertextual (Allen 2011; Hermans 2010 [1996]; Ye 2004 [1993]), meaning that people write, read, and make sense of this convention by considering how it relates to other texts, institutions, and cultural repertoires⁶. As I show here, different international gatekeepers have interpreted C138 in different ways by tracing and challenging its connection to Western ideas, institutional values, and other conventions and treaties. Today, C138 carries with it all those possible interpretations. So, before we can understand how the Bolivian working children's union rejected C138, we need to understand what I call this convention's cultural, institutional, and textual baggage.

C138: A summary

⁶ Scholars have defined "intertextuality" in many, often contradictory ways (Allen 2011: 2). In this chapter, I use Kristeva's original formulation of the term in her interpretation of Bakhtin, where "any text is a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (1980: 66).

The ILO presented the Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (C138) in 1973. It asks that all member States establish a minimum age so that only children older than that age can work. C138 sets 15 as the minimum, although it allows countries “whose economy and educational facilities are insufficiently developed” to set the age at 14 (Article 2, paragraph 3). The point of having a minimum age, according to the ILO, is to help member States “pursue a national policy designed to ensure the effective abolition of child labor” (Article 1). Legal scholars call this an “abolitionist” stance (White 2005: 327), a black-and-white position that sees child labor as morally wrong, a problem to eliminate.

C138 applies to all economic sectors, regardless of whether children have signed a formal contract or receive regular wages (Article 2, Paragraph 1). This is different to previous conventions that aimed to regulate work only in specific economic activities like in industries (C005; C059), agriculture (C010), or mining (C123). Now, C138 does allow exceptions: Under extreme circumstances member-states can decide that their minimum age laws do not cover “limited categories of employment [where] special and substantial problems of application arise” (Article 4, Paragraph 1). Also, in individual cases, national authorities can decide that younger children can work in artistic performances (Article 8, Paragraph 1). But the ILO insists that at least some occupations are never acceptable for younger children – “mining and quarrying; manufacturing; construction; electricity, gas and water; sanitary services; transport, storage, and communication; and plantations and other agricultural undertakings mainly producing for commercial purposes” (Article 5, Paragraph 3). Some children are just too young to work at this.

The Convention also recognizes a lower minimum wage for “light work” – 13 if the national minimum age is 15 or 12 if the minimum age is 14 (Article 7, Paragraph 4). C138’s definition of “light work” is broad: it is work that will not harm children’s health and development and will not interfere with their schooling (Article 7, Paragraph 1). C138 doesn’t specify how to measure and judge this harm and interference. The ILO leaves those decisions to national

authorities, who must now regulate the hours and conditions of children's light work (Article 7, Paragraph 3). A later ILO report found that no nation has done so (Creighton 1997: 375).

The ILO distinguished "light work" from "child labor" because it does not believe all child work is wrong. For the ILO, light work is when young children "help around the home, run errands, or assist their parents in the family farm or business" and when older children "take on light jobs or learn valuable traditional trades" (IPEC 2002: 3). The ILO sees light work as part of a child's socialization: children can "acquire the skills and attitudes they will need as future workers and useful members of the community" and they can "learn to take responsibility, and gain pride in their own accomplishments" (3). In C138, the binary is simple: Light work is good, child labor is harmful because the latter "deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity" (IPEC 2004: 16).

The alternative to child labor, in C138, is education. Article 2 specifies that a state's minimum age cannot be less than the age at which children complete compulsory schooling. Article 6 concedes that the convention doesn't apply to work in vocational training, in technical education, or in schools. Work and education, in other words, are seen as mutually exclusive. The ILO Committee of Experts does recognize that employers can hide economic exploitation by claiming that it is educational. The organization encourages national authorities to police the boundary between education and work (Creighton 1997: 377).

The overall aim of C138 is to eradicate child labor under the age of 14. Since 1973, the ILO has expected member States to extend regulation to excluded sectors and to "raise progressively the minimum age for admission to employment" (Article 1), so that, eventually, they can set it at 16 (Recommendation 146, Paragraph 7.1). C138, in short, is straightforward, its goal is clear. But, like all international conventions, it carries cultural, institutional, and textual baggage. In what follows I discuss these different types of references and underlying meanings, showing how cultural shifts, institutional values, and other international declarations and conventions have shaped the way different actors produced, spread, interpreted, and adopted C138.

Cultural baggage: Western images of child labor

Childhood, as we have now discussed, is a cultural construction (Prout and James 2015: 8). Who is labeled a child, until what age, and with what associated roles and responsibilities varies across space and over time (Ariès 2005[1962]; Corsaro 2015; Cunningham 1991; Frankel 2012; Lynch 2014; Mintz 2004; Zelizer 1985). Societies have defined children – or certain subsets of children – as embodying good, embodying evil, or as morally malleable (Synnott 1983). Societies have marked the end of childhood with rites of passage (James and Prout 2015: 216; Turner 1968; Van Gennep 1960), like marriage, hunting, going to war, starting to work. Some societies and historical eras don't even mark a clear line between child- and adulthood. Ariès (2005[1962]), for instance, argues that before the Renaissance there was no “childhood” in the West: Artistic representations up to the fourteenth and early fifteenth century show children as a part of the world of adults: dressed as adults, eating with adults, playing with adults, working with adults (37). In Medieval and Early Modern societies, Ariès claims, “childhood was a period of transition which passes quickly and was just as quickly forgotten” (34)⁷.

Starting in the sixteenth century, however, European views of childhood began to change. Some early modern writers saw children as inherently evil: Calvin, for instance, remarked that “their whole nature is a certain seed of Sin, therefore it cannot but be hateful and abominable to God” (quoted in Synnott 1983: 80), U.S. Puritans John Dod and Robert Cleaver wrote: “The young child... is altogether inclined to evil” (80). And for British philanthropist Hannah More: “It is a ‘fundamental error to consider children as innocent beings’ rather than as beings of ‘corrupt nature and evil dispositions’” (82). Others, like John Locke, disagreed. Citing Aristotle, Locke wrote that “A child’s mind is like ‘white paper, or wax, to be molded and fashioned as one pleases” (80).

⁷ More recent scholars like Orme (2001) now challenge Ariès’ widely accepted views, noting that childhood was more “special” than previously thought. Still, the meaning of childhood has changed throughout the centuries and only today do we think of children as embodying a special, sacred innocence.

Children, in this view, were morally neutral blank slates. In contrast, Romantics like Jean-Jacques Rousseau called children morally superior and pure. The first line of Rousseau's book *Emile, on Education*, starts: "God made all things good, man meddles with them and they become evil" (81).⁸ As Synnott writes, early modern ideas about childhood "[were] not static and uniform but rich, varied, confusing and moving fast" (82).

By the eighteenth and nineteenth century, people in the global North had reached a relative consensus: children were now seen as vulnerable, simple, sweet, silly, cute, irrational creatures, objects of adult love, pity, and control (Ariès 2005 [1962]: 133). Childhood was now synonymous with innocence, which meant lacking adult knowledge and experience but also lacking adult sin (113; also Synnott 1983: 85). Children stood outside of society and were therefore closer to nature and to God (Cunningham 1991: 3; Hendrick 2015: 31; Jenks 2005: 6). They were pure, uncorrupted, moral, and sacred (Hendrick 2015: 32). But standing outside of society also meant that children were potentially dangerous; people believed children could become wild and feral if they weren't controlled (Boyden 2015: 170; Cunningham 1991: 5). Nineteenth century children – or at least the middle class and elite children of the colonial center (Pedraza-Gómez 2007: 26) – had to be protected from the polluting influences and temptations of adulthood. They had to be kept in the private sphere, in the educational system, off the streets (Cunningham 1991: 231)⁹.

At first, this view was not incompatible with children working. Rather, many moral entrepreneurs thought that work was good for sacred, innocent children (Cunningham 2011: 63). In the early, proto-industrial global North, children worked in agriculture and in small, family-based workshops (63). Commentators at the time celebrated this work and called it the cure for idleness (Milne 2008: 45). They believed idleness and free time provided too many temptations,

⁸ It is therefore ironic that Rousseau sent five of his children to an orphanage (Synnott 1983: 81).

⁹ Interestingly, a study of 19th century Brazil found that many parents kept children out of school and working because that was the way they thought children would get a better education (Kuznesof 1998). We need more comparative historical research on cultural and political definitions of child labor in the global South.

that children would become lazy, unruly, willful, and possibly violent (Boyden 2015: 170). Work, in contrast, was said to teach values like usefulness, duty, obedience, and discipline (Zelizer 1985: 59). Work was so moral that a British writer remembered: “children, at work from age five, singing ‘short moral songs’ as they worked, reduced grown men to tears at the exquisite appropriateness of what they saw” (Cunningham 2011: 63)

But by the late nineteenth century all of this changed. Industrialization intensified child work (Cunningham 2011: 64). Reformers publicized reports about abusive work conditions and people began to spread new images not of singing working children but of tired and hurt and broken children in cotton mills, coal mines, and factories (65). Historians today debate over how widespread these types of work really were, as opposed to work in the less controversial agricultural and urban informal sectors (65). Regardless, these were the images that most people associated with the term “child labor,” a term that was introduced in England at the time and had explicitly negative moral connotations (65). People stopped saying that children were valuable because of the money they brought to the home but that children were valuable because of the emotions and love they provided (Zelizer 1985: 64). Moral entrepreneurs began to argue that if children stand outside of society they should be kept outside of society, as sacred, sentimental, innocent, priceless, objects (6; 21). Children belonged at school or at home or at the playground, not in the factory or in the mill or in the coal mine (100).

In order to establish this new view of childhood, reformers turned to the law. After extensive debates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries around Europe and the United States, states started to regulate child labor (Cunningham 2011; Lieten and Meerkerk 2011; Zelizer 1985). They wanted to control the number of hours children could work, the safety and conditions of children at work, and the age at which children could legally begin to work, the age that marked the end of sacred, innocent childhood (Zelizer 1985: 72). In the United States, for instance, the age moved from 10 to 12 to 14 to 16 over time (76). Other European nations followed their examples, often adapting British laws without writing their own (Cunningham 2011: 68). Reformers made

different types of arguments to support their positions – child labor is inefficient, child labor takes work away from adults, child labor produces uneducated future workers, child labor gives some countries unfair advantage over others (68) –but the most common and seemingly most persuasive argument was moral child labor is wrong (Zelizer 1985: 72). Child labor went against established images of childhood.

But not all work went against established images of childhood, some work reinforced these images. For instance, people still thought that agricultural work was good for children (Zelizer 1985: 77). Then, as today, most working children were employed in agriculture, either on their family's farm or working for a third party (Lieten and Meerkerk 2011: 13). But then, as today, people often idealized agricultural work: Hindman (2011) calls this “agrarian romanticism” (391), a “love affair with all things rural” (391). While Hindman argues that this was a particular American affliction rooted in the US's history and racial imagination (392), others have found similar infatuations in Brazil (Kassouf and Dos Santos 2011), Ghana (Van Hear 2011), colonial Zambia (Grier 2011), to name a few. As reformers debated child labor laws in the early twentieth century, they talked about agricultural work, but not much (Zelizer 1985: 79). People saw farm work, as opposed to industrial work, as more natural, traditional, timeless, safe (77-79). It confirmed rather than challenged ideas about children's innocence and place outside of society.

Another type of work that conformed to romantic ideas about childhood was child acting or artistic performances. As Zelizer notes (1985), “in a bizarre turnabout, prominent child labor reformers [in the United States] were suddenly the leading advocates of child labor on the stage” (86). They claimed child actors were learning, not working (92). They claimed children were doing this work for pleasure, not profit (94). Zelizer argues that this twist occurred because “the work of child actors was ironically camouflaged by their fictional roles” (95). Child actors successfully performed the sacred, innocent persona for their audience (95).

As child labor laws aimed to safeguard this sacred child, they became a moral benchmark for families. Zelizer (1985) writes that “advocates of child labor legislation were determined to

regulate not only factory hours but family feeling. They introduced a new cultural equation: If children were useful and produced money, they were not being properly loved” (72). And child labor laws also became a moral benchmark for states: they became a way to classify states as “civilized” or “uncivilized” (Cunningham 2011: 68). Cunningham tells us that by the 1880s, “countries that were slow off the mark to legislate began to feel that it reflected badly on them” (68). And European states also deemed that many of their colonies were “not ready” for this mark of civilization: often the argument was that “the time is not ripe” for child labor legislation (71).

We cannot forget that all these moral debates took place and were shaped by the context of colonialism. While some children toiled in cotton mills, others had to weed, thin, and pick this cotton first in Egypt, in India, in Vietnam (Cunningham 2011: 67). We know very little about how many children worked in the colonies, under what condition, and since what age (67). We do know that the moral outrage over child labor in the global North was not about them (Pedraza-Gómez 2007: 26). On the contrary, children in the global South were sometimes rhetorically mobilized to fuel this outrage. Some British reformers, for instance, “wondered whether they were creating ‘white slavery’ at home while abolishing black slavery in the colonies, and felt that God might judge harshly a nation whose prosperity was built on child labor” (Cunningham 2011: 65). Reformers at the time lived in a world divided into colonizers and colonized and, for many, only one group had a moral obligation towards its children (71).

Moral entrepreneurs in the global North institutionalized the romantic view of childhood in national child labor laws. Other entrepreneurs and actors carried this view as they started creating international organizations and conventions (Boyden 2015: 173). This is the “cultural baggage” they brought: a view of children as separate and different to adults, of children as innocent of the ways of society, of children as vulnerable, sweet, passive, pure, in need of protection and control, of child labor as a mark of unloving families and uncivilized nations.

Institutional baggage: The values and logic of the ILO

The ILO Convention No. 138 is shaped by Western images of childhood. It is also shaped by the institutional history and culture of the ILO. The ILO was founded in 1919, and, like other international organizations, the ILO has increasingly embraced a distinct set of principles and values (Lechner and Boli 2005; Meyer 2010). Here I focus on three of these values – individualism, universalism, and legalism – that have most influenced the construction of C138.¹⁰

The ILO was founded by the League of Nations at the end of World War I (Lieten 2009: 139). It is a tripartite organization that brings together governments, unions, and employers organizations to decide on international laws and standards concerning work (139). The ILO has created several conventions on specific labor standards as well as recommendations on how to achieve these standards. The ILO wants member states to ratify and then incorporate these standards in national legislation (139). Apart from providing standards, the ILO also supervises procedures and provides technical and legal assistance to states (139). It has no way of enforcing its norms or standards but does carry strong normative and persuasive power (Lieten 2009: 142).

From its inception, the ILO has been concerned with child labor. In its 1919 Constitution, the organization already mentions and stands against this issue (Creighton 1997: 364). And in its very first meeting in Washington DC, the ILO established six Conventions, two of which regarded the employment of children. Convention No. 6 on Night Work for Young Persons in Industry said that children under 18 could not work at night and Convention No. 5 on the Minimum Age for Employment in Industry said that children should not work until they turn 14, setting both the age and the “abolitionist” approach that the ILO still uses today (Cullen 2005: 87). Some children, in this view, are just too young to work. The state is responsible for prohibiting their employment.

Over time, the ILO adopted the value of individualism. It began treating children as individuals separated from the family (Boyle, Smith, and Guenther 2007: 257). Conventions and treaties always celebrated the family and, at first, lawmakers had assumed that families knew what

¹⁰ For a more complete discussion of the history and structure of the ILO, see De la Cruz, Von Potosbsky, and Swepston 1996.

was best for children (263). But, by the middle of the twentieth century, lawmakers began to note that the family and the children's interests might not be the same, that families might also exploit or abuse their children (264). Later ILO conventions, like the 1999 Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, claim that if work is harmful to the child it is unacceptable; the convention makes no exceptions for family work. These changes were part of a broader trend in international law where global institutions made the individual sacred (Elliot 2014), "the high god of modernity" (3). International instruments also turned children into a sacred, single child (Boyle, Smith, and Guenther 2007: 263).

Lawmakers also increasingly saw their particular definition of childhood as universal (Boyle, Smith, and Guenther 2007: 257). Early documents like Convention No. 5 noted differences between children in Europe and elsewhere: In Japan, children were allowed to work from age 12 due to different educational systems (Article 5). In India, children could also work from age 12 and even younger, but not in large manufactories, mines, quarries, or transportation (Article 6). And European colonizers were technically supposed to "apply [this Convention] to [their] colonies, protectorates and possessions which are not fully self-governing" but could decide not to apply the Convention "where owing to the local conditions its provisions are inapplicable" (Article 8). Children around the world were not equal under international law. But by 1959, when the ILO presented its Convention No. 112 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment as Fishermen, there were no longer any country distinctions, all children were now covered by the same global norms. International legislation institutionalized "the idea that a child 'here' is essentially the same as a child 'there,' and every child is entitled to similar things" (Boyle, Smith, and Guenther 2007: 257). Different local children became the global child.

And the global child was, almost always, a potential victim (Boyden 2015: 174). In 1920, Eglantyne Jebb, co-founder of the organization Save the Children, wrote the Declaration on the Rights of the Child after witnessing the suffering of children in World War I (174; also Fass 2010). This declaration aimed to protect the child, offering rights that, in practice, could not be guaranteed,

“the right to love and understanding, for example” (Boyden 2015: 174). Still, this document was adopted by the League of Nations in 1920 and later was the basis for the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959 (Imoh 2012: 22). It set the stage for how international actors would legislate over childhood: The global child, from the start, was seen as a victim that the international community needed to protect from hardship, from marriage, from movement, from war, and from child labor.

Especially in the first half of the twentieth century, the ILO and the international community aimed to protect children through Conventions and laws. This meant looking at the problem of child labor and children’s rights through the lens of social work and the legal professions (Boyden 2015: 173). This logic tends to downplay the social, political, economic, or cultural conditions that might be shaping the lives of children and instead advocates “individual remedial solutions to social problems” (173). International organizations usually looked for individual causes, asked how to fix individual actors, thought of individual “case histories,” and talked about “cures” (173). Child labor was a legal problem, a regulatory problem, a national problem, something that states could and should fix.

The ILO was central to the globalization of this individual, universal, legalistic view of childhood: more than half of all the international conventions and treaties on childhood were written by the ILO (Boyle, Smith, and Guenther 2007: 261). And while most of these instruments treat child labor as a labor market issue and not a children’s rights issue (White 2005: 331), they have helped set the terms of how international actors talk about and legislate over children (320).

From 1919 to 1965, the ILO created ten conventions on the minimum age for employment in different economic sectors. By 1932, when the ILO presented its Convention No. 33 on the Minimum Age in Non-Industrial Employment, the organization had established its general principles on child labor: that children should not work under the age of 14, that children can do light work after the age of 12, that at no age should children engage in harmful employment, and that states should progressively raise their minimum age standards for work “dangerous to a child’s

life, health, or morals” (Cullen 2005: 90). Even though a 1966 ILO survey found that most countries hadn’t ratified or didn’t comply with these conventions, their principles did not change until the end of the century (90). Almost ten years after the survey, the ILO wrote Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Employment to bring together all these previous instruments, along with their cultural and institutional baggage.

Textual baggage: C138 and other conventions

We cannot understand C138 without talking about Western representations of childhood. We cannot understand C138 without talking about the institutional values of the ILO. And we cannot understand C138 without seeing it in relation to other international conventions, those that came before it – the previous ten ILO conventions on the minimum age in various sectors – and those that came after it – the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, and the ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor. The ILO and the new children’s rights NGOs that appeared in the 1980s and 1990s all read C138 in relation to this web of texts. And their interpretations continue to shape how we read C138 today.

C138 and past minimum age conventions

The ILO presented C138 as the culmination of more than fifty years of legislation on child labor. The instrument restated ideas from previous conventions – it is, in fact, almost exactly like the ILO Convention No. 33 on the Minimum Age in Non-Industrial Employment (Cullen 2005: 90). Like previous texts, C138 treats child labor as a labor regulation problem and it proposes an abolitionist solution. But C138’s aim was also to “gradually replace” existing, sector-specific documents (Preamble), redefining child labor as all work, not just formal employment (Article 1). C138 built on and departed from existing international instruments.

C138 was born in a different global context than previous conventions. Former colonies were becoming independent nations (Strang 1990). The global North was entering a phase of post-industrialism (Archer 1990). And the child labor of the 1970s was different to the child labor of 1919. The images of children in factory floors and cotton mills that had outraged reformers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century global North were replaced by images of children in plantations and in coal mines, children making bricks, carrying loads, stitching carpets, children, mostly, in the global South. Although to this day children still work in all regions of the world (ILO 2017: 8), C138, and most of the work done by international NGOs, was implicitly directed at the global South in particular (Manzo 2008: 636).

The ILO wrote C138 to be as flexible as possible, accommodating local differences. C138 included exceptions to the rule (Article 4, Paragraph 1). It included the option for a slightly lower minimum age (Article 2, Paragraph 3). The ILO knew that if C138 was too restrictive, most countries would simply not ratify it (Swepston 1982: 583). Those drafting the Convention tried to walk a fine line between ideal goals and real-world means (583).

And yet, their efforts missed the mark: very few countries ratified C138. From 1973 to 1990, only 39 out of 155 countries had ratified this convention, and none of them were from the global South (Creighton 1997: 383). This number, Creighton tells us, was “a long way behind that for the core Conventions relating to freedom of assembly, forced labor, and discrimination, all of which [had] attracted in excess of one hundred ratifications” (383). C138, in other words, failed.

The ILO claimed that most people didn’t understand the convention and had misunderstood its flexibility (Creighton 1997: 375; ILO 2010: 13). Scholars claim that many states resisted the convention because it went against local ideas about childhood and work, the convention “met resistance in societies whose child-raising values include introducing children to work at an early age” (Myers 2001: 47). Whatever the reason, by 1996 only 33 out of 155 member states had set minimum age provisions for all forms of work in their national legislations (ILO 1996: 33). States usually didn’t apply minimum age standards on family work, domestic work, or work with few

people, like “apprentices, self-employed persons, homeworkers and temporary casual workers” (33). And states usually didn’t define or regulate light work at all (34). Member states, in other words, clung to the idea of the sector-by-sector approach of previous conventions, even if these conventions didn’t enjoy high ratification rates either. C138, in many ways, was bested by its predecessors, was weighed down by its Western assumptions.

Also, C138 came to the world just as many people began forming NGOs dedicated to children (Dottridge 2009: 143; also Fass 2010). And the people in these NGOs didn’t agree on how to think about child labor (143), adding more confusion to the issue and to C138. These NGOs were all “motivated by a sense of moral outrage” at the plight of working children in the global South, but disagreed on how states, NGOs, and individuals should assist working children (143). Some were in favor of minimum age standards and blanket bans, like the ILO. Some wanted to take a more targeted approach and focus on the most harmful forms of child labor. Some did not engage in legal debates at all but instead provided services for working children like meals, health check-ups, and help with homework. And some believed that working children should be empowered, that individuals, NGOs, and states should help working children organize into unions so that they can defend their rights as workers (143; see also Coly and Terenzio 2007; Plateau 2007; Reddy 2007; Roschanski 2009; Taft 2015; van den Berge 2009).

For the most part, the ILO did not engage with these different points of view. Instead, it invested in “public awareness campaigns and the dissemination of information” to try and get people to understand C138 (Creighton 1997: 367). When the ILO did discuss C138’s unpopularity, it claimed that states did not understand the document – “some member States view the text as too complex and too difficult to apply” (ILO 1996: 28). Or, on rare occasions, the ILO claimed that states, employers, and parents were in a state of denial (4): In a 1996 report, the ILO portrayed the 1970s and 80s as a time when “child labor was viewed with a mixture of indifference, apathy and even cynicism. It was so widely practiced that it was accepted by many as part of the natural order of things. For others, child labor was equated with child work, excused with the argument that work

is good for children and a means of helping families” (ILO 1996: 4). The ILO never specifies who believes all these things, although clearly the organization disagrees (4). What is also clear is that C138 did not become the authoritative moral text the ILO had wanted, directing the international conversation on child labor.

The international landscape, however, would not stay so fractured for long. Throughout the 1970s and 80s, NGOs, activists, and the UN delegates from Poland were lobbying the UN for a new convention on childhood (Dottridge 2009: 143; Milne 2008: 48). And in 1989, after 10 years of drafting, amid the tense international context of the Cold War (White 2005: 330), the UN presented its Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

C138 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Unlike C138, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was a resounding success: It is “the most widely signed rights treaties in the history of international law” (Montgomery 2009: 6). It is also the most influential international treaty regarding children (Doek 2007: 61; Gran 2017: 25.9). Myers (1999) writes: “No observer of the history of child labor thought and action can fail to be impressed by the rather sudden and dramatic changes of perspective attributable to the influence of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).” (14). This convention set the stage for how people think about, talk about, and legislate over children around the globe. The stage has stayed the same ever since.¹¹

The CRC was so revolutionary because, on the one hand, it cemented the long-brewing notion of the individual, universal child: in the CRC all children are equal in all ways – children are broadly defined as “every human being below the age of eighteen years” (Article 1) – and all children are autonomous individuals whose interests supersede that of their families, communities, or states – “In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social

¹¹ A discussion of the UN CRC and its optional protocols, as well as the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, exceed the scope of this chapter. For a useful introduction see Gran (2017) and Fass (2010).

welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration” (Article 3, Paragraph 1).

But, on the other hand, the CRC challenged the basic representations of children in previous international instruments. The CRC now saw children as increasingly active subjects (Boyle, Smith, and Guenther 2007: 267), it grants children freedom of expression (Article 12, Article 13), freedom of “thought, conscience and religion” (Article 14), freedom of association and peaceful assembly (Article 15), the right to privacy (Article 16), and the right to information (Article 17). The passive child of nineteenth century laws, the passive child of C138, has become the active, agentic child.

The CRC still portrays children as vulnerable, innocent, and mostly outside of society. The Convention’s preamble, for instance, notes that children are “entitled to special care and assistance,” and that “the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.” But, unlike previous conventions, the CRC does not draw the line between childhood and adulthood by looking for an objective age or a particular rite of passage. Rather, the CRC treats the shift from childhood to adulthood as gradual, the boundaries between the two groups as porous: rights and freedoms should be granted “in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child” (Article 5). Scholars have divided the CRC into protection rights, provision rights, and participation rights (Mayall 2000: 249; Milne 2008: 50). These participation rights are only possible because of the new, gradually agentic definition of childhood.

The CRC transformed the way people thought about children and, by extension, thought about child labor (White 2005: 330). Throughout the 1990s, international agencies, international NGOs and activists adopted the CRC as canon (Dottridge 2009: 145). Although some people still disagreed on how to address the issue of child labor specifically, they could all agree on the importance, the correctness, and the validity of the CRC (IWGCL 1998: 59). This instrument was broad enough to attract several different perspectives and it was also authoritative enough to give

different actors common guidelines, a common ground. People now read all international documents on children – including C138 – in relation to the CRC, speaking retroactively about these instruments in terms of children’s rights (Doek 2007: 71).

The CRC only discusses child labor in article 32, although the article calls it “economic exploitation,” not “child labor.” But, mostly, article 32 is in line with the ILO; its wording is similar to C138. Like C138, it opposes “any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education” and work that might be “harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development” (Article 32, Paragraph 1). It also asks states to implement particular laws “having regard to the relevant provisions of other international instruments,” implicitly referencing C138 (Article 32, Paragraph 2). It requires countries to “provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment” (Article 32, Paragraph 2; see also Swepston 1982).

That being said, the CRC also differs from C138 in important ways. The UN convention presents children’s economic exploitation as a human rights issue, not a labor regulation issue (Cullen 2005: 93). It also focuses on avoiding harm, not avoiding work altogether (93). The article, for instance, asks states to “Provide for appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment” (Article 32, Paragraph 2), whereas C138 only asks for regulation of “light work,” not work in general. Article 32, in other words, marked a first shift in the international approach to child labor, moving away from a straightforward abolitionist position and towards a prioritization approach (97).

By the 1990s, child labor was back on the international agenda. And, for the first time, people defined the global fight against child labor as a global rather than national commitment (White 2005: 327). It wasn’t enough for the ILO to pressure states to change their laws. International actors also needed to aid, guide, fund, support, inspect, and, yes, also pressure states. Much of this pressure came through public moral shaming: In 1992, for instance, NBC reported on working children in Bangladesh who made clothing for Wal-Mart, causing national outrage (Pierik

and Houwerzijl 2006: 194). In 1995, US Senator Tom Harkin proposed a much publicized bill to stop the import of products made by children (194). And while this bill didn't pass, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association listened and fired "an estimated 50.000 children: 75 percent of the total then employed" (194). Several activists also promoted the use of labels guaranteeing that products were not made by children and the use of corporate codes of conduct that committed businesses to stop employing children (Cullen 2005: 88).

Then, as today, most working children worked in the agricultural, domestic, and urban informal sectors, not making products for export (ILO 2017). But the campaigns in the 90s focused on exports anyway, because the problem directly involved consumers and companies from the global North, because it is easier to regulate industrial work than informal or agricultural work, and because Western narratives about child labor have always been about industrial work (Cullen 2005). Children in sweatshops stitching clothes call to mind the nineteenth century children in coal mines and textile mills. It was, to put it callously, a more familiar form of child labor.

International agencies and organizations also caught the global enthusiasm over child labor. Since its founding in 1946, UNICEF – the UN Children's Fund – had largely ignored child labor. The organization had been more interested in safeguarding children's survival from birth to age 5. But UNICEF gradually turned its attention to older children and by 1994, UNICEF established a global policy on child labor specifically (Fyfe 2009: 132). The World Bank, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also began to show interest in child labor at this time (Fyfe 2009: 133). In 1999, the UN and world business leaders also came together to create Global Compact, an initiative that promoted ILO standards, including standards on child labor (133).

At first, the ILO was not at the center of this global effervescence. Activists, NGOs, and international organizations were talking about child labor in the new and different language of children's rights (Dottridge 2009: 145) and C138 was still mostly ignored (Doek 2007: 71). Child labor wasn't central within the ILO either, so much so that in 1992, when the German government

wanted to donate money to a UN agency to create a program to study child labor, it approached UNICEF and not the ILO (White 2005: 331). Eventually, Germany did turn to the ILO and from that financial injection the organization created IPEC, the International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (331). This was a turning point for the ILO: In a few years IPEC became the largest division within the organization (Lieten 2009: 141). And through IPEC, the ILO repositioned itself in the international community.

IPEC was founded in order to provide technical assistance to countries with high rates of child labor (Cullen 2005: 94). It brought the language of human rights to the ILO and institutionalized the idea that the fight against child labor requires global cooperation (88). But, unlike previous international efforts, IPEC did this first by conducting extensive research (104). The program also focused on small local projects and specific policies (104).

In its first few years, IPEC downplayed the importance of C138, like everyone else: in its early publication the program rarely referenced this convention which, as Cullen (2005) writes, “is not surprising given the low level of ratification at this stage” (104). What is more, in 1996, IPEC and several children’s rights NGOs advocated for a new ILO convention on child labor (White 2005: 332). These actors embraced the innovations of the CRC, mainly the focus on harm as opposed to work (Cullen 2005: 103). They wanted a convention that made certain “worst forms” of child labor a priority for states and international actors. IPEC and others proposed a move away from the “abolitionist” perspective of C138 to a “prioritization” or “first things first” approach (White 2005: 322). In response, in 1996 the ILO began holding workshops before drafting the Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor (C182).

C138, in short, had a rocky start. For twenty years, most states didn’t ratify the convention. NGOs weren’t convinced by its position. Even IPEC, a division within the ILO, largely overlooked C138. This was partly because of the convention itself– its approach to child labor, its difficult goals – and partly because of the convention’s relationship to cultural and institutional values – ideas about the passive, sacred child, ideas about universal rules for individual children. But it was

also because of the convention's departure from previous instruments on child labor and, later, because of the overwhelming popularity of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The CRC redefined the terms in which actors spoke about child labor. And some actors explicitly used the CRC to support their position against C138.

C138, the International Working Group on Child Labor, and the Kundapur Declaration

In 1992, two of the largest children's rights NGOs – Defense for Children International and the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect – established the International Working Group on Child Labor (IWGCL 1998: i). This group joined activists and academics to conduct research, influence policies, and foment grassroots participation around child labor. It was meant to be a bridge between the different children's rights NGOs with their varying positions towards child labor and UN agencies like UNICEF and the ILO (Dottridge 2009: 146). But the working group went one step further, introducing a new actor in international debates on child labor: working children themselves (IWGCL 1998: i).

The Working Group wasn't the first organization to want to include children, but it was one of the most influential (Dottridge 2009: 146). The Working Group justified this "child-centered approach" by citing the CRC: "such an approach is backed by the most widely subscribed to international human rights treaty to date, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child" (IWGCL 1997: 3). The CRC grants children the right to an opinion, to express that opinion, and to form organizations and groups. The Working Group read this as allowing working children to form and express their own views on child labor (IWGCL 1998: 60). What is more, the CRC stresses that states and organizations defend "the best interest of the child." For the Working Group, this meant listening to children: adults alone do not know what is best for children, as evidenced in the fact that adult laws and projects and campaigns do not always work (IWGCL 1997: 3). The Working Group, in other words, placed the CRC in opposition to existing child labor laws and conventions, like C138.

C138 and other minimum age laws focused on getting states to ban, prohibit, and eliminate all employment under a certain age. But, the Working Group noted, these laws were rarely enforced and when they were they could actually harm children, pushing them into more hidden and dangerous occupations (IWGCL 1998: 44). The Working Group often gave the example of the Bangladeshi working children who were fired after activists and exporters pressured the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Export Association (Pierik and Houwerzijl 2006: 194). A follow-up study by the ILO and UNICEF found that, in spite of the activists' good intentions, the children's lives were now considerably worse. Half of the dismissed working children was working in garbage collecting, brick making, and prostitution. The other half was still looking for employment. None of them had returned to school (IWGCL 1998: 44). Before their dismissal, a group of working children had written a petition asking instead for 5 to 6 hour workdays that could be combined with 2 to 3 hours a day at school (44). They had wanted improved work conditions, not the prohibition of all work.

The Working Group argued that this request was common among working children, that because children stand in a particular economic, social, and cultural position they can see that there are few real alternatives to work (IWGCL 1998: 74). Therefore, the Working Group claimed that governments, NGOs, and researchers should always listen to children: "there is a need to move away from moral stances and political posturing and tackle the realities of working children's lives" (IWGCL 1998: ii). True to form, the Working Group also included the voice of children making this request: the leader of a working children's union in India said:

We are calling on international agencies and policy makers to respect our views. The decisions taken in the past have proved failures. Until now you have been taking decisions without consulting us. We have waited for many years for our problems to be solved. Now our involvement in decisions may make a difference (quoted in p. 72).

The International Working Group did specify that including children's voices didn't mean "doing what children want": "Such a view is naïve and misleading [...] The CRC does not advocate that children be given total power over their lives" (1998: 60). But the group also opposed symbolic

or tokenistic use of children (71). The International Working Group argued instead that, without losing sight of “children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development” (71), adult organizations need to open a space for children’s participation by helping children organize into base-like unions, providing them with resources and expertise, identifying representative children, and inviting them to forums with adults (60). Underlying this view was a different image of childhood: that of a rational, agentic, gumptious child who is capable of representing her group’s best interests (62).

The International Working Group was not claiming that children weren’t innocent, it wasn’t opposing wholesale the Western view of childhood. The child that appears in the Working Group’s reports and books is still vulnerable and still needs adults, adults who should “educate, empower, and enable” her development (IWGCL 1997: 13). But now the child is also an agent, with clear views and opinions. Interestingly, this child is still seen as a universal individual. Although the International Working group argued that C138 and minimum age laws ignored cultural particularities (IWGCL 1998: ii), although the group claimed that researchers and activists need to be attentive to how “traditional values” shape child labor (i), although the group preemptively defended itself from charges of cultural relativism (20), it nonetheless made claims about all children everywhere: all children have a right to participation, all children can understand and diagnose their social world, a few child delegates can represent all working children (60).

The Working Group never explicitly claimed that states should eliminate their minimum age restrictions, it never called for the outright dismissal of C138. The group did, however, call minimum age standards “narrow” and “orchestrated from the outside,” as opposed to inside different states and with attention to the needs of working children (IWGCL 1997: 11). It also disagreed with C138’s distinction between “good light work” and “bad child labor” (IWGCL 1998: 35). Like the CRC, the International Working Group suggested that we focus on harm and conditions of labor, not on types of employment (35-43).

In 1996, the International Working Group put all this theory in practice and, along with the Save the Children Fund, hosted the First International Conference for Working Children in

Kundapur, India (IWGCL 1998: 67). Children and adolescents from working children's organizations from thirty-three countries from Africa, South-East Asia, and Latin America met for ten days, along with their organizations' "adult collaborators" and representatives from the NGOs (67). After discussing common problems and proposed solutions, the children drafted the Kundapur declaration, a document in which they asked their representative governments four things: (1) to allow them to participate in creating laws and policies concerning child labor; (2) to provide specialized public services like health and education for working children; (3) to recognize and support working children's initiatives and projects; and (4) to re-evaluate the meaning of child labor. In this declaration the working children concluded: "We are against the exploitation of our labor, but we are in favor of a dignifying job with a schedule suited for our education and spare time" (see Appendix 2).

The Kundapur Declaration, in other words, opposed the abolitionist ethos of C138. And the International Working Group on Child Labor, drawing on the CRC, listened to the children (IWGCL 1997). The Working group interpreted C138 using the CRC as a lens, placing one convention in opposition to the other, preferring the second over the first. As we shall see in later chapters, even today many critics of minimum age standards use the same interpretive strategy, they judge the ILO Convention No. 138 in reference to the more canonical Convention on the Rights of the Child. C138 carries this "textual baggage" twenty years later.

But the 1990s was not the end of C138. The convention had been ignored, sidelined, criticized, and rejected but the ILO had not given up. By the end of the millennium, the organization recast this convention as a human rights rather than labor rights instrument, making it more compatible with the CRC. The ILO also tied C138 to its more successful successor, C182, the Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labor.

C138, the ILO Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, and the ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

In 1998, the ILO presented the Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights to Work (Cullen 2005: 101). This instrument explicitly uses the language of human rights and recasts existing ILO conventions to make them into human rights instruments (101). The document also specifies which, out of all the ILO's concerns, are the most important. It names four: freedom of association and right to collective bargaining, freedom from forced or compulsory labor, freedom from discrimination in employment, and the abolition of child labor.

The ILO had never used this kind of instrument before, it had only written a constitution, binding conventions, and nonbinding recommendations (Cullen 2005: 101). What is new about this Declaration is that it is mandatory: The declaration claims, that "all Members, even if they have not ratified the Convention in question, have an obligation arising from the very fact of membership in the organization, to respect, to promote and to realize [them]" (1998). If a state wanted to belong to the ILO it had to uphold the ILO's values, including its stance against child labor.

Of the four principles, child labor was the least accepted around the world: C138 "had the lowest number of ratifications of all the conventions referenced in the declaration" (Cullen 2005: 102). But it was now on the agenda: states were required to provide annual reports on all four principles, had to change their laws and their national practices, and had to undergo ILO supervision and review on the four new priorities (103). The ILO had no way of forcing states to do this, it has no real power to coerce its members (Halliday and Osinsky 2006: 449). But it set normative expectations, which included a certain position towards child labor. And, one year later, it presented a brand new child labor convention.

When the ILO had drafted C138 in the 1970s, there were few international NGOs dedicated to children or child labor. But as the ILO prepared C182 at the end of the 1990s, there were now hundreds of NGOs that wanted to be active partners in this process (Dottridge 2009: 143). This was the first time the ILO included NGOs in workshops and debates prior to a convention and the integration of different viewpoints was often difficult and tense (White 2005: 332). Many actors within the ILO – some states, trade union federations, employer organizations – specifically resisted

and resented some of the NGOs arguments questioning the morality of child labor, the idea “that children should have the right not only to (good) education and protection from exploitation but also ‘work with dignity’” (332). And when NGOs and groups like the International Working Group on Child Labor brought to the meetings eight working children, representatives from organizations from the global South, then the tensions mounted (White 2005: 332). Opposing ideas about child labor that had been simmering for the past few decades now came to a head first in Amsterdam in 1997 and then, later that year, in Oslo (IWGCL 1998: 68). It seemed like the new convention on child labor would have as many problems as the last one.

But that was not the case. The ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor was adopted on June 17, 1999. Unlike C138, it was an immediate success, “the most rapidly and widely ratified convention in ILO history” (Cullen 2005: 94). The ILO presented this document as the logical culmination of all the 1990s debates: the preamble cites C138, the CRC, the 1998 Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work as well as other international instruments on the abolition of slavery. In so doing, C182 both acknowledged its debt to past conventions and elevated the maligned C138. The preamble notes that this new convention will “complement the Convention and Recommendation concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, 1973, which remain fundamental instruments on child labor.” This document also put the contentious 1990s debates to rest: this was now the official way to approach child labor around the world, compelling states to “take immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor as a matter of urgency” (Article 1).

In a way, C182 is also a minimum age convention: it defines certain forms of work intolerable for all children and defines children like the CRC, as “all persons under the age of 18” (Article 2). Some of these worst forms of work are unacceptable for adults as well, like “all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery” (Article 3), but others are not: adults can and do participate in armed conflicts, pornography, and prostitution (Article 3). However, the underlying logic of C182 is not about age or even about type of work. Like the CRC, and like the proposals of

many NGOs, C182 focuses on harm. It defines the “worst forms” as “work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children” (Article 3). The ILO was and is aware that this definition is hard to operationalize: Back in 1981, the ILO Committee of Experts acknowledge that “dangers to health and safety are ‘normally simple to define, and easily identifiable.’ However, ‘[d]angers to the morals of young persons... are more difficult to classify, but should also be regulated by national authorities” (quoted in Creighton 1997: 380). In C182, the ILO similarly states that what is harmful work “shall be determined by national laws or regulation or by the competent authority, after consultation with the organization of employers and workers concerned” (Article 4). The ILO does not mention consulting children.

In contrast, Recommendation 190 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, the ILO encourages states to design programs of action “taking into consideration the views of the children directly affected by the worst forms of child labor, their families and, as appropriate, other concerned groups committed in the aims of the Convention and this Recommendation” (Paragraph 2). In other words, states should ask the children and take their opinions seriously with regards to the means of eliminating the worst forms of child labor. But they should not compromise on the end goal, on eliminating this practice. The people who drafted C182 and this recommendation listened to organizations like the International Working Group on Child Labor up to a point, without yielding their ultimate aim.

Also unlike C138, C182 provides alternatives. Article 7 and Paragraph 12 of the recommendation asks states to establish penal sanctions against those who use children in forced labor, prostitution, pornography, or illicit activities like the drug-trade or the use of firearms. But these instruments also tell states to prevent child labor in the first place, to provide “necessary and appropriate direct assistance for the removal children from the worst forms of child labor and for their rehabilitation and social integration,” to create “free basic education, and whenever possible and appropriate, vocational training” instead (Article 7). Article 7 also asks states to pay special

attention to children at “special risk” as well as girls. Part of this process includes establishing authorities responsible for implementation, adapting state bureaucracy to the issue of child labor.

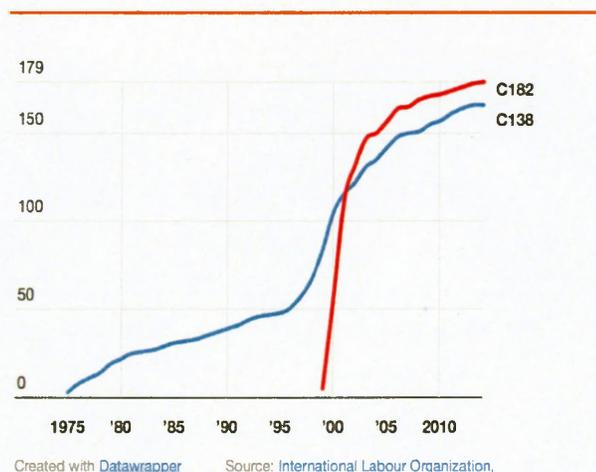
But, for C182, the state is not alone in these efforts. C182 was written in a different international context than C138, people now spoke of “globalization” as a social process and developed a global imagination or “global consciousness” (Robertson 2016). C182 was the heir of the global exhilaration of the 1990s, the global commitment to children’s rights. Therefore, article 8 notes that “Members shall take the appropriate steps to assist one another in giving effect to the provisions of the Convention through enhanced international cooperation and/or assistance.” Similarly, Recommendation 190 notes that “Enhanced international cooperation and/or assistance among Members for the prohibition and effective elimination of the worst forms of child labor should complement national efforts,” for instance mobilizing resources, providing legal and technical assistance, exchanging information and “support for social and economic development, poverty eradication programs and universal education” (Point 16).

C182, in short, is very different to C138. The idea that there are “worst forms” of child labor suggest that there are better or, at least, benign forms. C182 espouses a “prioritization” or “first things first” approach over the “abolitionist” view of C138 (Cullen 2005: 97). Also, C182, unlike C138, draws on extensive research on child labor, its causes, consequences, and the impact of different types of interventions (White 2005: 329). This is why C182, unlike C138, specifies the need for practical alternatives although, like C138, it focuses on education, not improving the conditions of work. C182 still sees children as largely passive, innocent victims but in its associated recommendation it does recognize that children that have views can help address this issue, granting children some agency amid constraining social and economic circumstances. C182, in short, challenges many of the central notions of C138. And yet, C182 also opened the door for C138 is eventual, long-awaited global acceptance.

Several legal scholars and historians have noted how C182 relates to and moves away from C138 (Cullen 2005; White 2005). What is less often acknowledged is how the reception and

meaning of C138, in turn, changed thanks to C182. Figure 3 shows the ratifications of C138 and C82 over time and we can see that while C138 stalled in its acceptance for its first twenty years. It only picked up the pace in the late 1990s, after the ILO Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights to Work (1998) and C182 (1999). The ILO deliberately tied these conventions together and placed them at the forefront of the ILO’s agenda. IPEC, which initially had ignored C138 now “actively links to all ILO standards relevant to its work” (Cullen 2005: 104). The ILO, which initially worried that states didn’t understand C138, now considers It “the bedrock of national and international action” (Davidson 2001: 210). Doek (2007) describes it as one convention pulling up the other: C182 was “driven by the momentum created by the CRC” and C138 then gained attention and acceptance “in the slipstream of this success” (71).

Figure 3. Ratifications of C138 and C182, 1975-2014



C138 today: The intertextuality of international conventions

As of September 2017, 170 out of 196 countries and territories have ratified Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Employment, compared to only 48 in 1990. Since that time, members of the ILO have presented C138 and C182 as part of a single unit, encouraging states that have ratified one to ratify the other (ILO 2002: 8). Also, IPEC has promised financial and technical

assistance on the condition that states ratify both conventions (Myers 2001: 47). The ILO now celebrates the conventions success and writes that there is “an unprecedented convergence of thought and action” around child labor (ILO 2002: 2). The battle for C138’s acceptance has largely been won.

Time and again, the ILO presents a world that stands together against child labor, writing statements like “the abolition of child labor has become a *global cause* for the new millennium” (ILO 2002: ix, emphasis added) and “*The world’s indignation* about the many injustices faced by its children is now being translated into action, on an ever-larger scale” (61, emphasis added) and “*None of us* wants to live in a world where more than 200 million children have to work at the expense of their and our future” (ILO 2010: 1, emphasis added). And the ILO would seem to be right: Today the globe shares a World Day against child labor (ILO 2010: 39), it has seen a transnational march against child labor (Dottridge 2009: 146), and Kailash Satyarthi, from the NGO Global March Against Child Labor, shared the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize with Malala Yousafzai for his activism for education and against child exploitation (Nayar 2015). The international debates over the meaning of child labor, heightened in the 1990s, are mostly over (White 2005: 334).

The ILO has incorporated some of the lessons from these 1990s debates. The ILO now recognizes the agency of children, up to a point. In its first global report on child labor, *A Future Without Child Labor* (2002), the ILO conceded that: “Perceptions of children have evolved over time: children are now viewed less as passive objects of adult concern and more as human beings with rights of their own [...] There is no ‘universal’ child” (13). Also, in a handbook for labor inspectors, IPEC representatives (2002) wrote that “it is important to understand the situation from the child’s point of view” (29) and that inspectors should treat the working child “as a partner exploring a particular situation” (28).

But, unlike the International Working Group on Child Labor, the ILO does not think that children are in a position to understand their situation better than adults. Children are still fundamentally vulnerable to economic, social, political, and cultural structures, and poor children

especially so (IPEC 2002: 30). Children have conflicting needs and desires, their parents have conflicting needs and desires (30). The ILO argues that children understandably give priority to their short-term, basic needs over long-term goals like education, health, leisure, and creativity (30). Children have a view, but a *limited* view of their lives.

Still, the IPEC handbook tells inspectors to take children into account, for instance to determine whether the child has real alternatives to work: “the ultimate goal must always be kept in mind: that the child should be better off as a result of being removed, rehabilitated or prevented from working” (IPEC 2002: 39). But the ILO also tells inspectors not to be guided by working children’s opinions because “child workers themselves often strongly resist any efforts to remove them from work” (16) and “child workers may not [...] see themselves as victims but as assuming responsibility and earning the respect of their family, themselves and their community” (16). So while the ILO now says actors should be mindful of children’s views, the organization does not believe that these working children are always correct.

More fundamentally, the ILO disagrees with NGOs like the International Working Group on Child Labor – although never naming interlocutors directly– because the ILO does not think that actors should be “realistic” in their approach towards child labor. ILO spokespeople write: “Child labor is not inevitable and progress towards its reduction and even its elimination is possible when the political will to fight it exists” (ILO 2002: 7). Every four years the ILO reports on how many children work around the world, in what activities, and under what conditions (ILO 2010). And while child labor rates have declined more slowly than the ILO had hoped – the ILO has had to push back the date in which the world will be “free of child labor” from 2016 to 2025 (ILO 2017: 8) – the organization remains cautiously optimistic. In its latest report, a spokesperson writes that “the 2016 estimates tell a story both of real progress and a job unfinished” (8).

The ILO stands by and upholds C138, despite its rocky start. The organization states that “the ILO’s prime tool in pursuing the abolition of child labor has always been, and remains to this day, the labor standards that embody the concept of a minimum age to enter into employment.”

(ILO 2002: 7). But C138 now carries the traces of that rocky history, it carries extensive cultural, institutional, and textual baggage like Western ideas about childhood and child labor, the ILO's penchant towards individualism, universalism, and legalism, and an unstable, contradictory, changing relationship to other international treaties and conventions like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the ILO Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, and the ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor.

To a certain extent, the ILO has tried to manage C138's baggage. For example, the organization tries to soften C138's dependence on Western images of childhood. The ILO acknowledges that each culture may define childhood differently, saying that "in some societies, the integration of children into social and working life may be so gradual that it is not possible to separate these phases. Others demarcate childhood from adulthood either by fulfilment of certain social rites and obligations, or by age" (ILO 2002: 3). But the ILO also emphasizes that most people agree that children are vulnerable. Juan Somavia (2000), Director General of the ILO from 1999 to 2012, defined child labor as "an abuse of power. It is adults exploiting the young, weak, vulnerable and insecure for personal profit" (5). Similarly, an ILO 2002 report celebrates "the ILO's long-standing recognition of children's particular vulnerability to exploitative work because of their powerlessness compared to adults and hence the inability to protect their own interests" (13). In other words, the ILO doesn't think actors should focus on cultural differences but rather think of what makes children similar: around the world children live in asymmetry to adults.

The ILO does recognize the arbitrary nature of age as a marker of child- or adulthood, but it also claims that this is the simplest common denominator between different cultural views. The ILO states, matter-of-factly, that "it is age that international instruments generally use to define a child; they accord the rights and protection of a child for those under 18 (the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention No. 182), and set the minimum age of 15 for employment (ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138))" (2002: 3). The ILO downplays C138's cultural baggage by leaning into its institutional baggage, by playing

up the ILO's conviction towards universal standards for individual actors, it's focus on legal instruments that can be standardized and spread.

What is more, the ILO has tried to cement the meaning of C138's textual baggage, the organization almost always presents C138 as closely tied to C182, as part of the same overarching project (ILO 2010: ix). The organization also often mentions C138 in relation to the CRC, emphasizing what these conventions have in common rather than what makes them different (ILO 2017: 15). And while many of the ILO's current efforts include providing technical assistance and ensuring that laws are implemented, that doesn't mean that the organization thinks that conventions are no longer important. A 2017 report states that:

International standards and national labor laws and regulations articulate and formalize the State's duty to protect its children. They set out an unambiguous definition of child labor and the principles for national action against it. The ILO Conventions on Child Labor remain highly relevant and enjoy increasing numbers of ratification. (48)

The ILO is unequivocal in its position towards child labor and in favor of its first-things-first Convention No. 182 but also its abolitionist Convention No. 138. And this position is highly moral. An ILO representative wrote: "Child labor is a brake on sustainable development and anathema to just societies, and its eradication must be pursued with utmost determination." (ILO 2017: 15). Another spokesperson called this "a testing time for our values." (ILO 2010: 1). The debate, in many ways, is over, because "some things are just wrong" (ILO 2017: 15).

The world has lost some of its enthusiasm for the cause to eradicate child labor, the 1990s debates may have ended but so has most of the global excitement that animated these debates in the first place (ILO 2002: x). But the ILO wants to "recapture the sense of urgency" and "re-energize the campaign" (x). While there has been a decline in the number of working children from 2000 to 2016, in the last four years the pace of this reduction slowed down (ILO 2017: 8). So, in short, the ILO now worries about "a flagging in the worldwide movement, a certain "child labor fatigue"" (xiii). It wasn't expecting someone like Bolivia to re-open old disagreements, to question a now established convention.

Chapter four: Translating the priceless child

In the last chapter, I showed how different actors took the idea of the “priceless child” – first developed in the industrial global North – and wrote it into international conventions meant to be read and applied around the world. These conventions have always had multiple potential meanings. Each carries cultural, institutional, and textual baggage. International organizations tried to limit their meanings by spreading these conventions in bundles, tying the controversial ILO Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Employment (C138) to the more popular UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and later to the ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor (C182).

In this chapter, I look at how cultural brokers in Bolivia then translate these bundles, how members of international organizations, children’s rights NGOs, and the Bolivian Union of Working Children and Adolescents (UNATSBO) make global texts meaningful for their local audience, in this case the Bolivian government. Previous research suggests that cultural brokers translate according to their local structural position, their institutional identity, and pre-existing cultural assumptions (Kaufman and Patterson 2005; Liu, Hu, and Liao 2009; Mujica and Mesa 2009). In what follows, I show that while this is true for translators in Bolivia, it isn’t the whole story. The translators also interpret and transform one global text by drawing on another: they read C138 in relation to the CRC.

Different actors, activists, and organizations in Latin America have enthusiastically espoused the CRC. Actors have turned this document into a central, legitimating text in the field of public services for children. This means that the cultural brokers in Bolivia who argue over the minimum age for employment all draw from this same text in order to defend their arguments. They agree that the CRC is important, but they disagree on which part of the CRC is most important. Some cultural brokers emphasize children’s *protection* rights and therefore defend 14 as the minimum age for employment. Others, however, talk more of children’s *participation* rights and

believe children should engage in conversations on child labor and have a right to propose a lower minimum age.

I find that all the translators in Bolivia do adopt the priceless view of childhood, they all believe that children are innocent, vulnerable, special, and sacred. For all interviewees, children's value is emotional, not economic. They disagree, however, on how work impacts their emotional value. They disagree on whether C138 truly protects priceless children. In short, to reject one global convention, the Bolivian translators first have to accept another. They challenge the minimum age for employment not in spite of global norms but because of them.

The CRC in Latin America

The first child labor law in Latin America was Argentina's 1907 law on the Work of Women and Minors, which set ten as the minimum age for work (Alarcón Glasinovich 2009: 312). Over the next few years, all countries in Latin America adopted similar child labor laws (312). These laws were "more symbolic than effective" (312). They were shaped by local political discussions and representations of childhood. But they were also influenced by the globalization of the "priceless child."

Most Latin American countries – Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela – were members of the ILO since its 1919 inception ("Country Profile," no date). Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic joined in 1920, Mexico in 1931, and Ecuador in 1934 ("Country Profile," no date).¹² These countries, in other words, were embedded in international institutions and participated in international discussions over minimum age standards.

In the first half of the twentieth century – from 1919 to 1939 – Latin American states created laws and policies using what legal scholars call an "object-of-protection" view of childhood

¹² Only Belize, Guyana, and Suriname joined the ILO after the 1960s.

(Morais 2016: 11). Children were represented as passive, firmly outside of society, as either innocent or untamed (see also García Méndez 2006). Children were supposed to stay within the family, they were the family's responsibility, so the state only had to legislate over children who were somehow forsaken. States created laws and institutions to deal with abandoned children, orphaned children, or delinquent children (17). States created specialized laws and institutions to contend with these children in an "irregular situation": the "codes on minors" ("códigos de menores") and "minors' justice" ("justicia de menores") (17). State rhetoric at this time was couched in terms of benevolence but, in practice, these laws controlled and criminalized children, especially the children of the poor (García Méndez 2006: 111). Judges, social workers, psychologists, and educators were encouraged to use their personal discretion to decide on children's fate (116). Often this meant the state would institutionalize them in some way (116).

From the 1940s to the 1990s, Latin American states tinkered with their childhood laws but did not change them in any significant ways (García Méndez 2006: 118). Some scholars claim that the dictatorships of the 1970s and 80s in fact embraced this legislation. García Méndez, for instance, writes:

The laws on minors – particularly because of their effectiveness as an instrument of social control [...] – coexisted comfortably with the authoritarian politics [of Latin American dictatorships]. Their all-around discretion, where the law consisted of legitimizing what the person responsible 'believed was most convenient,' was a precious fount of inspiration for the penal and constitutional laws of authoritarianism (118).

Latin American laws on childhood would not change until the 1990s when two pivotal things happened: first, Latin American states returned to democracy, with a newfound enthusiasm for human rights, and second, the world met the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Local activists embraced children's rights as a new and righteous cause (García Méndez 2006: 115). International organizations and transnational children's rights NGOs opened offices throughout the region (Unda Lara 2009: 13). And the CRC itself provided not only a new language to talk about children, but also a new model of how to write legislation in general. Just as

international actors had written this convention in alliance with civil society, so did Latin American nations adopt a more “democratic” method of law-building (García Méndez 2006: 115). Brazil led the way in 1990 with its Statute of Children and Adolescents, opening the door so that local and international NGOs could debate on what this law should contain (111). The process, according to one legal scholar, “[stopped] being about esoteric and clandestine meetings between ‘experts’ that work in the basements of the Ministries of Justice to become [one of] huge socio-political laboratories of democratic judicial production” (112). From 1990 to 2005, other Latin American nations followed suit (relaf.org, no date). They stopped writing codes of minors and began writing laws on children and adolescents.

The change in term matters, it shows how the new laws codified a different view of childhood. Children were now seen as “rights-bearing subjects,” as opposed to passive objects (García Méndez 2006: 111). The laws now applied to all children, not only children considered deviant (111). And children were now the responsibility of three actors: their families, the state, and society as a whole. The new laws recognized that children are part of society, not outside and unconnected from society. In the new laws, the state was no longer seen as benevolent but was obligated to safeguard the rights of children (115). State actors could no longer legislate as they “believe is most convenient” but now had to follow specific guidelines and global objectives. Legal scholars today celebrate this second wave of legislation as being more modern, more fair, more democratic – more moral (García Méndez 2006; Morais 2016).

Questions over child labor were not central in the new round of debates. Many Latin American states adopted global minimum age laws as part of the CRC’s bundle. As Table 1. shows, most Latin American nations had not signed or ratified C138 when it came out in 1973. They signed only after they adopted the CRC and then C182.

Table 4. Year of ratification by country

	C138	CRC	C182
Argentina.....	1996	1990	2001
Belize.....	2000	1990	2000
Bolivia.....	1997	1990	2003
Brazil.....	2001	1990	2000
Chile.....	1999	1990	2000
Colombia.....	2001	1991	2005
Costa Rica.....	1976	1990	2001
Cuba.....	1975	1991	2015
Dominican Republic.....	1999	1991	2000
Ecuador.....	2000	1990	2000
El Salvador.....	1996	1990	2000
Guatemala.....	1990	1990	2001
Guyana.....	1998	1991	2001
Haiti.....	2009	1995	2007
Honduras.....	1980	1990	2001
Mexico.....	2015	1990	2000
Nicaragua.....	1981	1990	2000
Panama.....	2000	1990	2000
Paraguay.....	2004	1990	2001
Peru.....	2002	1990	2002
Suriname.....	-----	1993	2006
Uruguay.....	1977	1990	2001
Venezuela.....	1985	1990	2005

Source: ilo.org and treaties.un.org

As Latin American states moved in and out of dictatorships, as civil society adopted the global discourse of human rights, a parallel movement was growing: the movement of working children and adolescents. The ILO presented C138 in 1973, codifying the “abolitionist” view of child labor. As early as 1976, working children formed unions opposing this position (Cussiánovich and Méndez 2008: 10). The first working children’s movement in Latin America was Peru’s MANTHOC,¹³ the Movement of Working Adolescents and Children Sons of Christian Workers (10). The founders of this movement were working class children who had participated in labor

¹³ In Spanish, the “*Movimiento de Adolescentes y Niños Trabajadores Hijos de Obreros Cristianos.*”

marches alongside their parents (11). Now, according to movement collaborators, they wanted to create organizations of their own (11). With the support of local NGOs, they started a union whose goal was, since the beginning, to change public perceptions of child workers. The children wanted to be seen “not as victims deserving compassion, but as boys and girls who defend their life, their aspirations, and their work” (11).

The Peruvian working children’s movement did not support all child labor. Rather, it proposed a “critical valuation” of child labor, which, according to influential movement intellectual Alejandro Cussiánovich (2010), means being “vigilant, not naïve, permanently unsatisfied, stressing towards better opportunities, towards conditions that do not deprive [children] of the exercise of their other rights, especially education” (140). The organization, in other words, opposed children’s exploitation, supported education, but also argued in favor of the potential benefits of work. According to Cussiánovich, work teaches skills and solidarity, it helps reproduce cultural values and traditional practices, and it can even be “therapy for hyperactive, aggressive children” (Cussianovich 1988: 30). Work, in other words, can be good for children and should not be banned wholesale.

And just as the CRC had been a turning point for Latin American legislation, the CRC was a turning point for the working children’s movement, “opening windows for many things that, thirteen years prior, had been suggested and experienced” (Cussiánovich and Méndez 2008: 13). The CRC provided a legitimating language: after 1989 the movement invoked the language of children’s rights, especially their participation rights, which they extended into talk of “social protagonism” (Cussiánovich 2011: 23). The convention also gave the movement momentum: In 1996, the children of MANTHOC joined other organizations in Peru to form MNNATSOP, The National Movement of Organized Working Children and Adolescents of Peru¹⁴ (Cussiánovich 2006: 161). Soon after these organizations joined NATRAS, the union from Nicaragua, to create

¹⁴ In Spanish, “*Movimiento Nacional de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes Trabajadores Organizados del Perú.*”

MOLACNATs, the Latin American Movement of Working Children and Adolescents (Van den Berge 2009: 326). Throughout the early 2000s, other children and adults formed organizations in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, and Venezuela, eventually joining MOLACNATs as well. There had been working children's organizations in some of these countries before – one former UNATSBO leader, Gladys Sarmiento, told me there had been a budding organization in Bolivia in the 1980s – but the movements that exist today almost all were formed after the CRC. Almost all actively include the language of children's rights in their recruiting, movement activities, and public statements (see, for instance, the statements on molacnats.org).

The CRC also brought international attention and resources to the Latin American movements. The first working children's organizations had been supported, sometimes even started by local NGOs and foundations (Liebel 2004: 20). After the CRC, however, the movement began to receive international support. NGOs like Save the Children Switzerland and terre des hommes Germany, now stamped their logos on the different movements' books and brochures.

As mentioned in the last chapter, in 1996, the International Working Group on Child Labor and Save the Children invited working children from thirty-three countries to Kundapur, India, including representatives from MOLACNATs (IWGCL 1998: 67). The purpose was to foment children's participation. These NGOs cited the CRC, saying that this document encourages children to participate in decisions pertaining child labor (67).

During this ten-day conference, working children discussed common problems and solutions (IWGCL 1998: 67). They wanted to present a unified global movement. At the end of the conference, the working children presented the Kundapur Declaration, a statement on what all working children movements want from their governments. The declaration has ten points, cited here in full:

- We want recognition for our initiatives, suggestions and organization processes.
- We are against the boycott of products made by children.
- We want respect and safety for our work.
- We want an education with methods adequate to our situation.

- We want professional training suited for our context.
- We want to have access to good health system.
- We want to be consulted for any decision that affects us, whether local, national or international.
- We want a fight to be initiated against the reasons that are at the origin of our situation and first of all poverty.
- We want more initiatives in rural areas so that children don't have to go to the city.
- We are against the exploitation of our labour, but we are in favour of a dignifying job with a schedule suited for our education and spare time ("Kundapur Declaration," n.d.).

The problem, these movements argue, is not work itself but the conditions in which children are forced to work (Liebel 2004). The working children now spoke of "rights," aligning their requests to the language of the CRC.

In short, different cultural brokers in Latin America – and around the world – eagerly adopted the CRC, even if they held opposite views on child labor. This is true of the region and it is true of Bolivia, where international organizations, children's rights NGOs, and UNATSBO translate conventions on child labor for their local audience – the Bolivian government – they do so in relation to the CRC. In the following section, I introduce these translators and show how their translations are similar and different.

Cultural brokers in Bolivia: Similarities and differences

Many actors translate global norms against child labor into Bolivia: members of international organizations, members of children's rights NGOs, the leaders and adult collaborators of UNATSBO. Each group produces different types of translations: studies, policy recommendations, projects, proposals, draft laws, and political activism. But all these actors work with the same global texts: C138, C182, and the CRC.

Although the three types of translators believe that their views are incompatible, these cultural brokers agree on more than they think. They all agree that children's priority should be a formal education.

I think that the line [between acceptable and unacceptable work] has to do with school. If the kids can't keep up with the school schedule, if the school doesn't support the kids, if the conditions of work aren't good, that's never okay. (Liz Castro, National representative of UNATSBO).

Our position was that it was important to provide direct services to the children and adolescents, but to do that we needed to work with public institutions that are responsible of applying or not applying a law or program [...]. So part of our effort involved working with the Ministry of Labor, the Municipalities, the Ministry of Education, because we were proposing an accelerated education program that aimed to avoid educational lags. (Luis Stacey, Evaluation Specialist for Catholic Relief Services, former Director of the Child Labor Elimination Program of Desarrollo y Autogestión in Bolivia.)

All translators oppose the worst forms of child labor, specifically mining, brickmaking, and work on large sugar cane or hazelnut plantations.

Work is one thing, exploitation another, and [UNATSBO] is against child exploitation, we want to eradicate exploitation. (Adrian Piejko, Lawyer and adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

Almost all interviewees believe that light work is good for children, especially household chores and work in small family businesses.

Children can learn responsibility and experience from working here and there, with their family of course. What I've seen is that children who work a little are more sociable, more outgoing, they aren't afraid to talk [to strangers], when it's time to do presentations in school they are the first to want to do it. (Asked to remain anonymous, NGO employee).

I mean for a family, you are helping the family and contributing to the family, of course you also learn a lot when you work at a young age, you learn some values from doing that, as long as it's only light work. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of an international organization).

All interviewees recognize that in some indigenous groups in Bolivia children participate in farm work from a young age. They agree that this work is also good for children, that it teaches children skills, that it introduces children into the community, that it is part of Bolivia's traditional indigenous culture.

Now if you're talking about a person who lives in a rural community and their family is dedicated to agriculture and where children probably start to get involved in production activities probably from ages 13 or 12, sometimes less, and you say that that is acceptable

work, then I will say of course it is, because [the child] is a member of the family, because it is a way of disciplining, of assuring myself that children won't be involved in alcohol, drugs, and all the rest, etc. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of international NGO).

We need to separate the cultural from the purely work aspects. There are children who are working but it's part of their training. [JJ: *Like what?*]. In agriculture, for instance. They teach children how to harvest, sow, water, how to maintain the field. And that's part of the culture, the training, of what is being transmitted in all the [rural] communities. (Asked to remain anonymous, NGO employee).

For the translators, rural work has its roots in community and culture, whereas urban child work is the result of family poverty.

No child works as a hobby, as one idiotic congressman who said that some children work as a hobby. In real life, children work because they're hungry, they have needs, because their family doesn't have enough, it's a very deep matter. [...] It's a matter of poverty, of inequality, of the unequal distribution of poverty, of the lack of dignified work for adults... (Asked to remain anonymous, NGO employee).

When families have a better, more stable economy, when they get the right tools for their development, definitely there won't be any children working (Bernardo Pacheco, Participation facilitator in Adolescent and Youth Networks for World Vision)

I worked out of need, I don't want to say that now I don't have needs but now it's more to feel complete, since it's always been part of my life. [But] in the rural area the kids help their parents, so you can't just prohibit [work] just like that, there it's part of the culture. (Liz Castro, National representative of UNATSBO).

Many recognize, however, that working children today are less poor than working children a few decades ago. Today, children work for different reasons.

Before we used to shelter children and adolescents who worked and lived on the streets, but that was 29 years ago, almost 30. We had the house and they slept here and received medical attention. In those days there were a lot of working children because there was a lot of poverty, because of all the coup d'etat, the economic crises, there was a lot of poverty. Today the working children are different, they don't work because of extreme need but to buy things that their parents can't buy, a cellphone, a laptop, some even work to buy books and materials for school. They don't live on the streets. (Asked to remain anonymous, Adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

Also, some interviewees qualify their statements about poverty. For one NGO employee families *could* survive without child work.

It can be true but it can also be a myth, because in some families when their children stopped working and went back to school nothing happened to the family, meaning that they kept eating about the same things and their income was reduced but they found other strategies either to replace it or to live without this income, so it's kind of a cultural idea that because we're poor the children have to work too. (Luis Stacey, Evaluation Specialist for Catholic Relief Services, former Director of the Child Labor Elimination Program of Desarrollo y Autogestión in Bolivia).

This interviewee talks about “culture” in the city, but he is the exception. Most translators relegate “culture” to the countryside. Urban child work is almost always portrayed as an economic matter.

For most interviewees, the first people responsible for children are their parents. Some claim that children work if they don't have parents.

In [the city of] El Alto, one of the factors that determines whether [children] decide to work is that they are alone, they have no parents, they are on the streets and get distracted, they make friends. [...] Many children are orphans, or at least they don't have a father. So they have to work or go with their mothers to work. (Sandra Arellano, Child Protection Officer at UNICEF).

The next line of defense is the state, which “owes” children their rights. For some, this means that the state needs to ensure parents have better employment.

If [the parents] earn enough for rent, for the day's food, for the things their children need for school, then it wouldn't, they wouldn't... The informality [of labor] has spread through the country, so the first thing to do is give dignified work to the parents if we want to give a dignified life to the children. (Julia Velasco, Coordinator of the National News Agency for the Rights of Children).

For others, this means that the state needs to provide *children* with better employment.

The idea of the “critical valuation” of work is that [the state] needs to eliminate exploitation and provide dignified work where [children's] rights are recognized. [...] We need to protect children, make sure they have dignified work and can also exercise their other rights like education, health, etc. (Adrian Piejko, Lawyer and adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

Only a few people associated to international NGOs say that “society” broadly defined is also responsible for the welfare of children.

The three actors responsible over [children's] rights are the family, the state, and society. So, what do they need to do? What are their characteristics? What is the state's obligation and the family's obligation and society's obligation? To guarantee whose rights? Of children, of course! So it can't be that all three responsible actors fail and the children need

to answer for their own lives and for the lives of adults, that can't be! (Maria Gracia Morais, Legal expert and adviser to UNICEF).

This view, however, is rare. Most interviewees focus on individual families and how the state can strengthen or obstruct these families' efforts. Urban children, in this view, work almost exclusively because their families cannot provide for them.

More fundamentally, all three cultural brokers want what is best for children. For the leaders and adult collaborators of UNATSBO this means helping children find a sense of dignity.

With working children there have generally been two visions: one is the vision of scandal: "How are they going to work? How awful!" No? This vision of scandal has done much, much damage. And, on the other hand, there is the miserable-ist vision: "Poor things, the ones who work, poor things, little Indians," etc. So for us there's a third vision, the vision of dignity. These kids work, they are dignified, they don't put out their hand, they aren't asking for charity. They work and fight for their rights. (Jorge Domic, Director of Fundación La Paz, Adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

UNATSBO want to help working children to recognize this dignity, to feel proud and recover their self-esteem. For members of international organizations, in contrast, doing what is best for working children means keeping them away from work, especially the worst forms of child labor.

Do you think that making bricks, that that dust, that dust in your lungs, no matter how 'dignified' you call it, is that good for your health? If there is a cave-in [in a mine] and that kills him [the child], is that, would you call that... (she breaks off). That whole dignity thing is just a story ("*puro cuento*"). (Maria Gracia Morais, legal expert and adviser to UNICEF).

Some people see children working in the countryside, helping their parents, [they see] that its lucrative and that they learn. So they stay there, [they say] 'work is happiness.' But no one talks about children in mines, they only talk about the romantic part of child labor, they don't see the rest. (Asked to remain anonymous, member of international organization).

For members of children's rights NGOs, it is a bit of both: they want to protect children from the worst forms of labor but also empower working children. Often, local NGOs do this by providing direct educational, health, and leisure services, whereas international NGOs provide local organizations with funding, especially for children's participation.

We give educational support which isn't just helping them do their homework but also teaching them good manners, norms, rules, values. [...] We also have psychological support, we have a psychologist who handles cases of violence, conduct, or learning problems. We have medical support, a medic or nurse can come every 15 days and take a

look at the kids, [look at] the issues of deworming, vitamins, all that. Every trimester we measure height and weight to see whether the children are in their optimal nutrition... (Delia Poma Valverde, Director of the Centro Integral Santa María – Alpacoma).

Our work in general, well we don't have our own funds so we manage and we look for financing by creating projects or programs that we do according to different studies and data that we have of the context. We always look for projects that are relevant in terms of improving the way children's rights are being addressed in this country. So each area creates different projects, looks for financing, manages this financing, and implements the project, which is sort of how non-governmental organizations work everywhere. (Viviana Farfán, National Coordinator of Child Protection, Save the Children).

What we want is for children and adolescents to be protagonists, to be seen as rights holders that are present, are part of society, and can participate. (Bernardo Pacheco, Participation facilitator in Adolescent and Youth Networks for World Vision).

In short, while the groups disagree on what is best for children, they all claim to be motivated by moral ideals, by the desire to help working children and defend their rights.

In spite of these similarities, the different actors do disagree on two specific issues: on the morality of street work and on the minimum age for employment. Members of international organizations and some NGOs hold that street work is always unacceptable and risky, that no child under 14 should ever work in activities beyond the household, family business, or the farm.

Fourteen is a concession the ILO made, because the ILO really talks about 15. So countries with lower economic conditions can set the age at 14, that is the exception. But Bolivia now lowers it to 10, which denies all that. And I always try to put myself in the position of a ten-year-old and life goes by so fast, you grow up so fast. There is a world of difference between ten and fourteen. (Maria Gracia Morais, Legal expert and adviser to UNICEF).

Ten, eleven is too young. I think there's a certain... I think that kind of labor where you meet customers, where you're on the street, there's a big difference between family labor and hired labor and labor like that. Because there a child of eleven of course would be much more exposed to abuse, I would be very worried to send a child at ten or eleven out into the streets. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of international organization).

Other NGOs, however, believe that, like it or not, children under 14 do work, so the government should regulate rather than prohibit their labor.

Having criteria for age isn't essential, instead we need to understand whether age responds to a reality. If you go to El Prado [a large avenue in La Paz] you are going to see at least

right now, at this time, about ten children under the age of ten working. So there's a law but there's also a reality. (Jorge Toledo, Director of Fundación Arco Iris).

The ideal is that these babies don't work but the reality is something else. [...] The reality is that these little ones don't have a family, are orphans, or live in a situation of high vulnerability and poverty, so they say 'if we don't work, who is going to take care of us?' The government doesn't have a policy that says... because in other countries they do have that. And while there is this political absence then the children will keep working, although obviously we can hope that in jobs that don't affect them physically or psychologically. (Magdalena Chambilla, Social Worker of Hormigón Armado).

It's a reality, I don't agree that we should allow [child labor], but we have to recognize that there is a reality. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of international NGO).

UNATSBO, in contrast, argues against minimum age standards and claims that, under certain conditions, street work can empower children. Some UNATSBO translators think that that the minimum age should be *lower* than 14.

Adult collaborator: I do believe, I do believe [in a minimum age for employment]. Because I believe that work is a conscious, voluntary, intentional activity. And if we have those three aspects then we can't think that what a three-year-old child does is work. It has to be a conscious and voluntary activity, if not its forced labor.

IJ: Is there an age when you think children start to have that conscience, that volition?

Adult collaborator: Starting at seven, eight-years old. The thing is that constructs of childhood, of adolescence, aren't universal.

Other UNATSBO translators at different moments in time have believed that there should be *no* minimum age at all.

We asked for children to be allowed to work independently without an age limit, because we've seen that children work from age 7, from 7 to 10... (Juan David, National representative of UNATSBO).

Today, most agree that 10 is the ideal minimum age, because children under 10 are more vulnerable.

We went to La Paz and debated [minimum age standards with other organized working children]. And they said no [to opposing all minimum age standards]. They said if we do that they'll criticize us and also we'd be increasing the risk of assault. [...] So we all said better to say 10, then [children] have the capacity and stature, a little more strength, and can manage heavier things, so we all said yes and set it at 10. (Juan David, National representative of UNATSBO).

For these interviewees, street work and work under 14 are a means to a more dignified life. A former UNATSBO leader tells three stories to make this point:

It's a mother with four children, she's a single mother. Her son started working independently at age ten. He doesn't work to pay his vices. The four children work to build their house. So work brings you dignity. If you don't work, you don't have any means of living so how can you improve your life conditions? Another example: Blanquita is 11 years old and sells candy in La España [a street in Cochabamba]. If you go to La España at night she is going to be there with her two cousins, Jimmy who is 8 and Carmencita who is 6, with their grandmother. So if they don't work then no one can pay the rent, because they work to pay the rent. Or in my case, for example, if I didn't work then I couldn't pay for my studies. So it was a way of helping my mother by telling her you work for this and that and I'm going to work for my studies. That way I graduated high school. So in that way, work dignifies, it brings you dignity. It's not saying 'Oh, poor me, I'm going to die. No one loves me. No one will give us anything. We need to go beg the government... no!' I have two hands, two feet, a brain, and I can work and move forward. Work brings you dignity. (Gladys Sarmiento, former UNATSBO leader).

In this view, Bolivian children only have two options: they can work and improve their lives or not work and wallow in poverty. The state is noticeably absent.

Because of these different views, the translators hold different positions toward the ILO's conventions on child labor, C138 and C182. Members of international organizations support the conventions, both because they agree with their content and because they support international treaties in general. They believe that states that ratify treaties should not break them.

Bolivia to my knowledge is the first country that has signed and ratified the conventions but is the first country to actually go against it. And obviously in the international context, where if you sign and ratify a treaty you abide by it, for the international community and especially for the U.N. community, obviously, it's not only about the substance of the case but also a matter of principle. Which makes it complicated. Obviously. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of an international organization).

Members of NGOs hold a more ambiguous position. They support the conventions, especially C182, but believe that treaties and laws should be practical and should correspond with the local reality.

When I started to learn more about working children I was conflicted, morally conflicted. Because as adults we want children not to work and to only be in school and that is the logic of most adults. But if you stand in the children's shoes and see their individual

realities that position changes. For me, the ideal would be that they start to work as soon as they finish high school, but that isn't possible. Personally, I would want the minimum age to be eighteen! But seeing their situation, their complicated situation... (Marlene Luna, Fundación Vamos Juntos.).

You have to see the nuances. It's never simple. But I think that there are things that a person, an organization, must have zero tolerance with and for me that is when the work conditions, when there are issues of insecurity, when it conflicts with education. In those cases, there should be zero tolerance, no negotiation, at that point it's a radical no. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of an international NGO).

UNATSBO translators, in contrast, openly oppose these conventions. They argue that C182 conflates crimes with work, polluting the latter by association.

I don't know in what country or where we could imagine that child prostitution, child trafficking, and pornography is *labor*. Come on! That is listed among the worst forms of child labor! But is that work? That's a crime! In our legal framework that is part of the penal code and it is part of a law against the trafficking of people. Those are crimes against humanity, especially if it involves children and adolescents. (Jorge Domic, Director of Fundación La Paz, Adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

They argue that C138 is arbitrary and that minimum age standards in fact make it more difficult for people to protect working children's rights.

They say 12 or 14, but what happens is that [children] work from 8 or 10, so they can't claim any of their rights, they can't be protected. (Adrian Piejko, Lawyer and adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

When [a child] denounced that they're being mistreated or that they weren't being paid as they should, they [government officials] would tell them 'But its forbidden for you to work, the code says 14...'. (Luz Rivera, Coordinator of the working children project of Pastoral Social Caritas Potosí, also adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

Some UNATSBO leaders claim that the abolitionist ethos of minimum age laws stigmatizes working children.

The ILO doesn't value the contributions we make, it doesn't value the work we do. They should support us, that way all of society would respect us, we would be in the best conditions. [Because] we don't do anything wrong, we don't make the country look bad. (Juan David, National representative of UNATSBO).

This senator said [...] in an interview ‘working children are the cause of poverty in Bolivia.’ That’s a form of discrimination, as in saying we are misery, the human waste of society. (Gladys Sarmiento, former UNATSBO leader).

Still, in spite of these differences, almost all interviewees speak in terms of children’s *rights*. Most of them cite the CRC specifically. Many call the CRC “the Convention,” as if it were the only convention or, at least, the only one that matters. Almost all claim the CRC as part of their institutional toolkit.

Here is a document where the guidelines are clear [...] Here is a document that reinforces change. This convention has been one of the most ratified because of its topic [...] so **definitely** there is a clear before and after this convention (Sandra Arellano, Child Protection Officer at UNICEF).

I believe that the Convention on the Rights of the Child is a fundamental instrument that has **definitely** oriented the work of institutions, organizations, and governments when it comes to children’s rights. I think that it establishes clear concepts so that there can’t be any evasions or misunderstandings. [...] It also complements a series of treaties, committee observations on children’s rights, which make it stronger, gives the document practical life, makes it more universal while at the same time it gives very specific orientations and helps establish mechanisms to assure that states are complying or not... (Asked to remain anonymous, member of international NGO).

Obviously the Convention of the Rights of the Child is one of UNATSBO’s tools as well. It is the maximum law if you want to protect children and adolescents. It is the root of all other codes in all other countries, so in that sense it is a very strong tool for the movement in Bolivia and in other countries as well. (Gladys Sarmiento, former UNATSBO leader).

“Definitely.” “Obviously.” For these actors, the importance of the CRC is evident. They don’t agree on the minimum age for employment, on C138, and some disagree on the boundaries of child labor, on C182, but they all espouse and celebrate the CRC. They all believe in and use the language of children’s rights.

Why? Why do these actors have such different positions towards international conventions? Given that they agree on so much – on the importance of education, on the value of light work, on the inadmissible nature of certain activities, on the benefits of family work, on the cultural roots of rural work, on the economic causes of urban child labor, on the importance of

putting children first and doing what is best for working children, and on the centrality of the UN CRC – why do they disagree on the minimum age for employment? Why do translate C138 in such different ways?

Existing research provides two answers: First, cultural brokers interpret global texts according to their social loyalties. Cultural brokers belong to a certain social group and work within certain institutions (Kaufman and Patterson 2005; Liu, Hu, and Liao 2009; Mujica and Mesa 2009). They are therefore “loyal” to certain interpretations of a text (Sapiro 2013; Tymoczko 2010). Second, cultural brokers work with established norms, practices, and conventions of translation (Hermans 1991; Simeoni 1998; Toury 2012). They have different ideas of what “counts” as a good translation, different assumptions about the nature of the text, the author, the source and target culture (Toury 2012: 63; also Lefevere 1992). The same is true of the translators in Bolivia. In what follows, I show how their translations are shaped by their institutional loyalties and their assumptions about translation, specifically their assumptions about the nature of law, the nature of knowledge, and the nature of culture. I show how these cultural codes lead them to read CRC in different ways and find it either compatible or incompatible with C138. Tables 5 and 6 summarize this chapter’s main findings.

Table 5. How cultural brokers agree and disagree

	International Organizations	Children’s Rights NGOs	UNATSBO
Agree			
What is a child.	Children become adolescents at 14.	Children become adolescents at 14.	Children become adolescents at 14.
View of childhood.	Children are special, moral beings. They are fundamentally vulnerable.	Children are special, moral beings. They are fundamentally vulnerable.	Children are special, moral beings. They are fundamentally resilient.
View of education.	Children’s place is in schools. Education is the way out of poverty.	Children’s place is in schools. Education is the way out of poverty.	Children’s place is in schools. Education is the way out of poverty.
Worst forms of child labor.	Prostitution, mining, sugar cane and hazelnut plantations.	Prostitution, mining, sugar cane and hazelnut plantations.	Prostitution, mining, sugar cane and hazelnut plantations.

Light work.	Light work is good because children learn moral values when they do household chores and help in their parents' businesses.	Light work is good because children learn moral values when they do household chores and help in their parents' businesses.	Light work is good because children learn moral values when they do household chores and help in their parents' businesses.
Rural work.	Rural work is good because children learn traditional values and are introduced into indigenous communal life.	Rural work is good because children learn traditional values and are introduced into indigenous communal life.	Rural work is good because children learn traditional values and are introduced into indigenous communal life.
Urban work.	Urban work, unlike rural work, is the result of poverty.	Most urban work, unlike rural work, is the result of poverty.	Most urban work, unlike rural work, is the result of poverty.
View of other cultural brokers.	The government is inefficient. Manipulative adults may be behind UNATSBO.	International organizations are unrealistic. The government is inefficient. Neither listen to working children.	International organizations do not understand Bolivia. They do not listen to working children.
View of themselves.	Want to ensure the dignity of working children.	Want to ensure the dignity of working children.	Want to ensure the dignity of working children.
Disagree			
Street work	Street work is always harmful for children.	Street work is an unfortunate reality and should be made safe.	Street work can be a space for education and affection.
Minimum age for employment	Bolivia needs to abide by international standards and make 14 the minimum age for employment.	Debates over the minimum age are irrelevant. Bolivia needs to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.	Bolivia should have no minimum age standards because they criminalize working children.

Table 6. Underlying similarities and differences between cultural brokers

	International Organizations	Children's Rights NGOs	UNATSBO
Translational norms			
View of law.	Lens. The law should show what Bolivia aspires for working children.	Mirror. The law should be practical.	Mirror. The law should grant working children their long overlooked recognition.
View of knowledge.	Should be based on facts. We need more studies and statistics on child labor.	Should be based on facts and experiences. We need studies and statistics but also to listen to working children themselves.	Should be based on experiences. We need to listen to working children themselves.
View of culture.	Surface. Cultural values are superficial and easy to change.	Container. Cultural values are deeply rooted in tradition and rarely change.	Container. Cultural values are deeply rooted in tradition and rarely change.
Intertextuality			
Legitimizing documents	UN CRC, ILO C138, and ILO C182.	UN CRC and ILO C182.	UN CRC.
View of children's rights.	Bolivia should emphasize protection rights.	Bolivia should emphasize participation rights.	Bolivia should emphasize participation rights.

Institutional loyalty

All the interviewed translators work within institutions: international organizations, children's rights NGOs, local foundations that support working children, and the working children's movement in Bolivia. Many of those in children's rights NGOs have worked in NGOs all their professional lives. Many of those in international organizations have worked in international organizations all their professional lives. Even the adult collaborators of UNATSBO tend to have worked in only one or a few different organizations, and almost always these organizations aim to provide support to children who work or who live on the street.

I was studying sociology and then, in the curriculum, they asked us [...] to conduct research. So I said I would do my research in Potosi. A friend of mine worked here before [in Caritas with working children] and I had never thought of that. I didn't know the population, so I came in. [...] Then I left the university and time went by and, well, I stayed. (Luz Rivera, Coordinator of the working children project of Pastoral Social Caritas Potosí, also adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

I'm a social worker and when I was in the last year [of college] I started working in Vamos Juntos, which is an institution that works only with [working] children. From 2008 to 2011 I worked there and we worked with three associations, Alcor, which is the shoe-shine [association], the next year Altra, for those who shine in El Prado [an avenue in La Paz], and the third year with [shoe-shine children] from Fátima. [...] Then I got pregnant with my little one and left. And then I got a job offer here, from Jaime Villalobos who is the director of Hormigón Armado. [Hormigón armado is also an organization that supports working children, especially those who shoe-shine] (Magdalena Chambilla, Social worker of Hormigón Armado).

I'm a trained psychologist. I have specialized in project [management]. And, well, I've always worked with children and in non-governmental organizations. (Viviana Farfan, National Coordinator of Child Protection, Save the Children).

This has led many interviewees to be "loyal" to certain interpretations of international texts. Their views are very consistent: members of international organizations read C138 one way, UNATSBO leaders and adult collaborators read C138 another, only members of children's rights NGOs show more variety. Interviewees often speak in the third person – "We hold..." "Our position is..." "We believe..." – or they name their organization directly – "UNICEF's policy is..." "World Vision does not..." Members of international organizations also talk in terms of cities, they mention "Geneva"

and “my colleagues in New York.” Members of international NGOs talk about “the region,” meaning the regional headquarters of their organization.

Members of national NGOs and local foundations often talk about foreign funders. One interviewee, who asked to remain anonymous, explains how the foundation she works for changed its focus from child protection to child participation. She tells me how this organization used to provide working children with free meals.

NGO employee: But that ended in 2012. So now less children come.

IJ: Why did it end?

NGO employee: Because the sponsors didn’t want to finance that anymore.

IJ: Why? What changed?

NGO employee: I don’t know. They only wanted to finance UNATSBO now, they were interested in participation rights, empowerment... But I heard that they are going to stop that as well in December [2016] because the working children issue isn’t as pressing anymore. So now the organizations want to finance things like the environment, violence, things like that.

When I ask her whether the foundation has sponsors from Bolivia, the interviewee laughs and says no, emphatically. Other local children’s rights NGOs are in a similar position: Most of their money comes from foreign donors and often these donors want to allocate their resources to specific projects. In this way, they can influence the local organization’s position and goals. Still, members of local children’s rights NGOs aren’t simply adopting an imposed view of the world. One interviewee, for instance, criticizes their international patron’s approach:

Save [the Children] wrote a project specifically to create a committee [of working children], to create a departmental movement. That project has a lot of positives but also a lot of problems, at least I think it doesn’t consider the bases enough, it only focuses on the leaders of each institution. This project works only with them, training them, making them more like leaders, it has its own training logistic. [This project] has an office and a computer and that’s another problem, it looks more like an adult than a children’s organization. [...] They gave children desks and an office, but the problem is that that changes the children’s mentality. (Cristobal Gonzalez, Educator from Fundación AVE, Adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

Still, while this interviewee disagrees with how Save the Children is investing its money, he nonetheless agrees on the importance of children's participation and empowerment. He and others are "loyal" to the overarching goal, if not necessarily to the means.

The leaders and adult collaborators of UNATSBO are also loyal to their organization. They use several terms developed by the national movement, by the regional MOLACNATs, or by movement intellectuals. They speak of "protagonism" instead of "participation." They ask for the "critical valuation of work." They speak of "dignified labor."

The goal is for [the working children] to recognize themselves as **protagonists** in this society, as a force for change, that by going out to work they are doing something for their economic situation, for their human situation. (Cristobal Gonzalez, Educator from Fundación AVE, Adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

They [people in Bolivian society] believe that a working child has to be dirty and all that, that they have to pity us. But we don't want their pity, we've never wanted that. We want **valuation** ("*queremos valoración*"), we want to be recognized. (Liz Castro, National representative of UNATSBO).

Some interviewees even repeat movement sayings that I heard in a regional conference in Paraguay: "Nothing about us without us." "We are not the problem. We are part of the solution."

All interviewees are careful not to misrepresent their institution. Members of international organizations and NGOs are especially careful, as their position in Bolivia is more precarious. In 2008, the government of Evo Morales expelled USAID from the country after they discovered the organization was financing Morales' political opponents (BBC 2013). Ever since international actors have been worried about their potential fate.

At the moment the ILO is very careful. They're not trying to step on the toes of the government but also they have pronouncements that are pretty harsh on the law. And then you have the other part of this which is UNICEF. It's like good cop, bad cop. They have been trying to work with the government trying to influence and improve and do better in this area. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of international organization).

We have always been with the new government, which has a particular political line, as all governments. This also has had certain consequences in other areas, so, without saying its good or bad, the line of this government has always been a bit against the intervention of international NGOs, this isn't a secret for anyone. That implies first, that things are now

more complicated for NGOs that want to work in the country. And second, the country has been declared one of medium income so, given that there are so many countries with extreme poverty, logically the funds have to be placed in those spaces. So, basically, what is happening is that there aren't that many financing sources while leads to many NGOs closing. (Viviana Farfán, National Coordinator of Child Protection, Save the Children).

We're careful [in our opinions] because it could cost Plan [International] it's permanence in the country. Because, in general, there is an issue that with just about anything the government takes it as political militancy. Some NGOs have left the country. (Gustavo Tapia, Research and Evaluation Coordinator, Plan International).

Members of international organizations, more than any other group, asked me to keep their interviews anonymous. They know that their opinions belong to more than just them. They are shaped by and they reflect back to their institutions.

Each group is loyal to a broad position towards international conventions. Each group is also loyal to a particular idea about the group. Members of international organizations, for instance, work to present themselves as *diplomatic*. They talk of dialogue, respecting sovereignty, and working together. They are aware that the Bolivian government – their audience – can see them as imperialistic. These interviewees are therefore cautious. One recommends that I be cautious too:

Just some advice: whenever you meet with government representatives, with people from, who are related to government or whatever, use the Ecuadorian angle, don't mention the US, the Yale, but use the fact that you're from Ecuador and that you're studying that, because within [the government] there's a lot of skepticism towards anything that is related to the US. Use the other half of your identity because if you're from Ecuador, [they'll say] 'Oh she's like one of us,' because this is a very strong and tense moment. Because whenever there is something going on inside of Bolivia which is bad or is seen as a problem, Evo will always try [...] to find an angle blaming the Americans. Every single time! [...] Here it's never, ever your fault, it's always someone else's, you will never [say] '*el vaso se cayo*' ['the glass fell']... No, you made the glass fall. (Laughs). [...] That's like enemy number 1, whatever happens. And it's the history of imperialism, I understand part of it as well. From what I hear, the way the US worked before... they were sitting with the ministers in their offices, they were dictating what Bolivia should do. That of course is not a nice history or a good thing to have, and I understand why they're against that. But they've expelled the USAID, they've expelled the US ambassador, 7 years ago. So of course we... (Trails off). (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of international organization).

Members of international organizations may not agree with the government's position but they work hard to change its mind. They operate not only with certain institutional goals but perform a tactful, sensitive institutional persona.

We actually do quite well, we work quite well. That's funny because you'd think that the government is so much the other way around, so different... But for instance we have this huge fight against coca, [...] we had this scorched earth tactic in Colombia trying to eradicate coca [plantations] in that way, which didn't work at all. But the government here has introduced this thing called "social control," so we won't eradicate everything because we need some areas for traditional use, for production. So then we will limit it, say each family has a right to x number of land and then with that [we will] try to introduce alternative productive methods to have them harvest other products. It's actually been quite successful and according to the statistics the number of hectares of production are going down. And now there are people from Colombia who come to see, to learn how this works because this kind of tactic has proven to be more efficient. [...] So in a sense rhetorically the government is very anti-international community but in practice they are easy to work with. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of international organization).

Members of children's rights NGOs, in contrast, tend to present themselves as *dedicated*. They talk of commitment, of completing projects, of working with local communities. They aim to coordinate efforts with the government.

Normally we try to coordinate with some government entities. We work a lot with the municipal ombudsman's office that are great allies especially with our projects. At least we believe that. We wouldn't be able to work if we didn't have this coordinated relationship. (Bernardo Pacheco, Participation facilitator in Adolescent and Youth Networks for World Vision)

They also know that the Bolivian government mistrusts NGOs, that the government wants to increasingly oversee and control them.

Our government doesn't approve of NGOs ("*no ve con buenos ojos*"). For instance, the mayors are copying [NGO's] projects and making them their own, and this is fine. They opened a house for working children. But they closed it immediately out of inexperience. We were happy to have working children go there but they closed it. The government doesn't understand [working children's] needs and issues but they also don't support us because they think everything is fine, we [Bolivia] are not as poor as before when it was extreme, and therefore we don't need NGOs support. The government is closing in so that no more NGOs can come. But we need more support, more training. (Asked to remain anonymous, NGO employee).

But, while the NGO interviewees tend to express their frustrations more often than those of international organizations, their priority is still the children, the communities. They want to show that they are committed to the cause of children's rights.

We work to promote the participation of children, adolescents, collectives. We work with existing organizations of children. They are our priority. (Gustavo Tapia, Research and Evaluation Coordinator, Plan International).

Finally, child leaders and adult collaborators of UNATSBO also embody a specific, institutional ideal. They present themselves as *child-centered*, committed to the idea that children should be the protagonists of their lives. So adult collaborators are in a tricky situation. They know that critics of the movement believe that they manipulate children.

There was a meeting [with representatives of international organizations] but the problem is that they might listen but nothing happens. The problem is that they think that the adult organizations are manipulating children. Every May first, on the Labor Day March, the working children also go, so maybe that's why they think that. (Isbel Flores, Coordinator of Sarantañani Trabajador, adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

Time and again, adult collaborators downplay their own role in the union. They talk about "opening a space" for children and "bringing out their voices":

We collaborate with the children. We clear their doubts: for instance, what does ILO mean? When there is some meeting or when they want to know if they can ask this or that... Sometimes they feel very insecure and we guide them so that they can make their questions or present their opinion. Each working child grows and gets his own politics and what we do is clear their doubts. Today they are more self-assured and what we do is accompany them, for instance to Cochabamba because they can't travel alone. We give them support. (Asked to remain anonymous, Adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

In September 2010 [the working children's movement] starts this process of writing down their own [legal] proposals. [...] Several representatives decide to create a proposal that allows them to work. This was my first professional experience in this legislative area, but really watching the working children and adolescents work in this... my function was mostly technical, writing it down and changing it into technical terms and the more complicated lawyerly things. Other than that [the working children] have a capacity to organize and propose and be clear, politically and socially, about the role that they occupy now... it was so impressive. (Adrian Piejko, Lawyer and adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

The adult collaborators present themselves as "double translators," interpreting global norms into the local context but also interpreting the children's ideas for an adult audience.

In short, how translators translate depends on their institutional loyalties – How do their institutions approach international conventions? Is there an established institutional position? What role does their institution ask the translators to play? But translators also translate according to their broader assumptions about and view of the world, a view that is shaped but not determined by their institutional positions. In the next section I turn to these assumptions, to what translation scholars call “translational norms.”

Translational norms

When translation scholars write about translational norms, they usually talk about certain operational assumptions about a text, ideological assumptions about its source, and “poetological” assumptions about the relationship between the source and the target culture, for instance which has the higher “aesthetic status” or which is associated to certain aesthetic tropes (Hermans 1991; Lefevere 1992; Toury 2012). In this section I am only going to focus on norms or assumptions about the text itself: assumptions about laws and about how knowledge and culture should inform laws. I find that translators disagree on how to read C138 not because they hold radically different views of childhood but because they disagree on what laws should look like.

Assumptions about the law: Lens or mirror

Why translate C138? What is the purpose of a child labor law? For members of international organizations, the purpose of law is to change reality, to provide a new moral benchmark for local actors.

Normally you don’t change the laws according to the reality, you will try to change the reality so it will be according to the law. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of an international organizations).

According to members of international organizations, national laws should draw on global norms – like the global norms against child labor – and try to create new, higher standards that will change

working children's lives. These translators worry that Bolivia might not have strong enough public institutions to enforce its laws.

The problem they [members of government] have is mostly about implementing [laws]. The framework for laws is quite good, actually. But the implementation, putting money aside... The problem with the Ministry of Labor is that they don't have the money to do what they need to do and they're trying with what they can. Most money [in the government] goes to infrastructure. They have a lot of money because of gas prices but they haven't put the money where the word is, not on these issues. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of an international organization).

The answer, in their eyes, is to improve the institutions, not to change the law. The law, for these translators, is a lens pointing towards where you want to go. And often they want the Bolivian government to point their lens towards international conventions and treaties.

To a certain extent, other translators agree: as mentioned above most talk in terms of children's rights and believe that national laws should draw from the CRC. But while members of international organizations see the law as a lens, meant to change local actors' focus, the leaders and adult collaborators of UNATSBO see the law as a mirror, meant to reflect reality.

A law just for being a law doesn't change anything, but it does try to change things. It will depend very much on the situation and the problem, where the law is directed, starting from a recognition of rights. What law *should* do is make visible a reality and from that visibility you can create public policies that are clear and that protect rights. (Adrian Piejko, Lawyer and adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

This argument isn't exclusive of UNATSBO. Latin American legal scholars call this perspective "substantialist," a materialist position that opposes the idealism and abstraction of law (García Méndez 2006: 114). Substantialism downplays "the strategic role of the law in positive processes of social change" (121). This approach "perceives child labor as a solution and working children as an unmodifiable reality, comparable to a natural disaster" (115). UNATSBO interviewees would never compare working children to a natural disaster, given its strongly negative connotations. But they do believe that Bolivia's reality is relatively fixed, that changing the social and economic conditions that lead to child labor is unfeasible.

[A senator] said we had to eradicate child labor in five years. That's what he said and we all [said] 'What? That's impossible!' (Gladys Sarmiento, former UNATSBO leader).

Therefore, these interviewees want laws that are more practical, that improve their lives in the short run and in concrete ways.

We heard that they were going to make a new law and [we said] 'Let's go! All together! We can all work together because this is what our fight is for!' [Interviewee: *And what did you talk about?*] We talked about how in the legal records for students [the government] should include a box that asks 'Do you work?' and 'In what schedule?' In what schedule so to improve tolerance in schools, because we've seen discrimination in certain schools. (Liz Castro, National representative of UNATSBO).

For UNATSBO interviewees, the law also grants or denies recognition. They feel invisible in previous child labor laws. Much of UNATSBO's political activism has been aimed at gaining this recognition. The organization, for example, lobbied the government when the Constitutional Assembly was rewriting Bolivia's constitution. Article 61 of the new constitution prohibits child *exploitation*, not labor, and allows "activities done by boys, girls, and adolescents in the familial and social framework" if they are "oriented towards their integral formation as citizens and have a formative function" (Article 61, Paragraph II). The leaders of UNATSBO claim responsibility for this article and call it a political triumph.

In the political constitution article 61 was reformulated so that now it talks about no child being exploited, mistreated, what have you. That was the achievement of all that process. The constitution now shows that [working children] exist, it makes working children visible, for us that was a step up. [...] Because in the previous constitution working children aren't there, they don't exist. But now here they are, they exist. We had to go through all that to get this. (Gladys Sarmiento, former leader of UNATSBO).

So, if for international organizations the law is a lens, showing you where the state should go, for UNATSBO leaders and adult collaborators the law is a mirror, reflecting what society is like and who is recognized in that society.

Members of national NGOs tend to side with UNATSBO on this point. Laws, in their view, should not be idealistic, laws should work.

No matter what the law says, there's a reality. What matters is how we improve children's lives. (Jorge Toledo, Director of Fundación Arco Iris).

Members of international NGOs try not to take sides, they talk about their own role helping the government implement laws, whatever they might be.

The law empowers local governments to create their own protocols to protect children, so we did an exercise, we made a proposal to support the municipal governments in these protocols. This isn't part of the institutional agenda but we want to go forward with this issue. [...] We aren't working formally as [names the international organization] but we help any way we can. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of an international organization).

None of the NGO interviewees, however, go as far as UNATSBO, claiming that the government should lower the minimum age for employment. They do not explicitly make statements as to whether the law *should* be a mirror or a lens. They often veer discussions of laws to discussions of public policy.

Translators' assumptions about law shape how they think C138 should be translated: the translation should be idealistic or practical, ambitious or careful, principled or realistic. It is not surprising that these actors disagree since their view of the finished product is so different. For some the law is a lens, for others the law is a mirror.

Assumptions about knowledge: Object or experience

What is more, the different translators disagree on what forms of knowledge should inform the law, they disagree on what types of arguments or data are valid in legal discussions. The translators once again offer two possible answers: knowledge can be technical or can be experiential, knowledge is an object or an experience.

For international organizations and NGOs, you understand child labor through social science. In our conversations, interviewees often reference this type of information, like existing studies and statistics. They also claim that people who defend some forms of child labor "don't have all the information."

They don't know about light work, they think the ILO is against work in its totality, so the children say 'They want to eradicate my work! What am I going to live on? If they are going to eradicate then I'm working illegally and so they are going to persecute me.' So that's a misinterpretation and it creates this great polemic. It's all talk because no one is really persecuting children. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of an international organization).

[UNATSBO representatives] want to be considered, want to make this issue visible and [show] that there are working children. They said that we need to recognize that there are children 8 to 10 years old who are working and we can't ignore them. But the previous law did not ignore them, there was a clause that said that all working children had the same rights and guarantees as working adolescents, they weren't ignored. But they [UNATSBO representatives] said that the law wasn't making the younger children visible and several organizations supported them as they made this demand. (Sandra Arellano, Child Protection Officer at UNICEF).

The solution to Bolivia's child labor problems is further research, amassing more facts to understand the situation better.

The leaders and adult collaborators of UNATSBO, in contrast, trust experiential knowledge: their personal experiences as, or close work with, working children.

[Child labor laws] aren't a topic, but an experience, a reality. It's a little hard to explain but its reality. I was there, trying to tell the authorities [about my work experiences] and the first time you see an authority that is tall, that has that position, you feel overestimated, you know? But after that meeting I realized they are people just like us, they are flesh and bones just like us, and that they have a voice and a vote ("*voz y voto*") just like us. After that meeting I never felt less than them because they might have a better position than me but that doesn't mean they are better than me, I can be like them and more, I have my experiences to share. (Juan David, National representative of UNATSBO).

Even though I haven't gone to university to a formal education, for me my university was life. My university was life and many people tell me that I have more experience than anyone in humanities that comes out of university brand new but doesn't know what to do. So for me life is my university so I say okay, I'm a doctor (laughs). (Gladys Sarmiento, former leader of UNATSBO).

So, for UNATSBO, members of international organizations and NGOs disagree with them not because they are missing facts but because they are missing the direct experience. There are, of course, exceptions. Not all interviewees see experiential and technical knowledge as incompatible.

[Some people] believe that the 'school of the streets' is enough to be an educator or collaborator for working children. I don't agree. You need to study. The children deserve people who know, because the school of life on the street is not enough. (Luz Rivera, Coordinator of the working children project of Pastoral Social Caritas Potosí, also adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

Jorge Domic, Director of Fundación La Paz and an influential thinker associated to the working children's movement, bases his arguments on empirical research.

In 1982 we conducted an investigation in the city of La Paz that had to do with the issue of children on the street and working. [...] In those days I was a consultant for UNICEF in Latin America and in that framework we made an analysis of the situation in Bolivia and another where we identified the massive emergence of working children in La Paz. [...] It was a qualitative and quantitative investigation. We established the dimension of the phenomenon in the city of La Paz and, on the other hand, come to know the circumstances that led to incorporation in work. (Jorge Domic, Director of Fundación La Paz, Adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

But even he elevated children's experience over his own expertise. When designing programs to support working children, Domic listens to what the working children want.

We designed a whole development process based on the children's participation, covering some needs and also oriented towards technical training [they asked for]. We have a center of technical training that at one point had ten specializations: automotive mechanics, turnery, welding, sewing, making clothes, making leather goods, gastronomy, carpentry, we also developed eco-tourism... (Jorge Domic, Director of Fundación La Paz, Adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

In other words, for UNATSBO, children's participation is not only their right but is also the best way to understand child labor.

Have you read Alejandro Cussianovich? He says, based on his experience in Peru, that [children's] work activities develop and help their education, not just academic but their life education. [...] We need more qualitative, more data. [Because] when you listen to the working children and adolescents you realize a lot of things. (Adrian Piejko, Lawyer and adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

Members of NGOs, want to combine both forms of knowledge. They often fund and conduct research in order to better understand child labor.

It is important to understand the national context in every sense, in the political and economic [sense], in order to make a more complete reading of this phenomenon and to

try and have a perspective more aligned to the rights of children, but also a perspective that is contextualized and realistic. It is very easy to fall into radicalizations when you don't have the context, so to make a complete analysis knowing the context, that is a goal. (Viviana Farfan, National Coordinator of Child Protection, Save the Children).

But they also acknowledge that personal experiences, the children's experiences, should inform government decisions.

We told legislators to sit with the children and listen to them, because why is civil society making a decision when we aren't working children? I was one as a young girl but I'm not any more. So with what moral, with what authority are they going to talk if they don't have the lives of those children? (Asked to remain anonymous, NGO employee).

Throughout my research, almost all interviewees express strong emotions at some point: some raise their voices, other are at a loss for words, a few scoff or laugh or shake their heads as they describe alternative positions. But members of international organizations and some NGOs nonetheless advocate a rational, emotionless approach to conversations on child labor. One interviewee, for instance, chastised UNATSBO for using "emotional manipulation" to "confuse" these conversations. The leaders and adult collaborators of UNATSBO, however, believe emotions are in fact the crux of child labor debates. The UNATSBO leaders, but not the adult collaborators, go so far as to reject "rational" facts if they lack emotion and a child's point of view:

UNICEF said that children suffer on the street, 'We have numbers [showing] that they suffer in the sugar cane plantations.' And we said, 'You may have all that data, but if you don't have information from UNATSBO that information doesn't count'. They only base [their arguments] on data and statistics, but we base ours on our reality. (Liz Castro, National representative of UNATSBO).

Interestingly, the few interviewees in NGOs or international organizations who had personal experiences with child work do tend to sympathize with UNATSBO. They concede that the movement has a point. Still, they uphold their institution's position and talk about research.

Assumptions about culture: Surface or container

The translators in Bolivia carry assumptions about the law, about what the law's purpose should be. The translators in Bolivia carry assumptions about knowledge, about which forms of data should inform law and policy. And the translators in Bolivia carry assumptions about culture, about social norms, traditions, and narratives and how they relate to child labor legislation.

Members of international organizations and some NGOs usually talk about culture as if it were a surface: it is people's dress, foods, customs, and traditions. It can be picked up and removed. It should be easy to change. It is often only a cover for economic concerns.

IJ: Some people say that we should not ban child labor because it is part of our country's tradition and culture. Do you agree or disagree?

Member of international organization: It depends on what kind of child labor we're talking about, if we're talking about mines, then I completely disagree because Bolivia is not there anymore, it has developed and it doesn't need it as much as it did before, and it is a practice that should be abandoned.

For some, changing culture is the government's responsibility. The state should do so by changing people's material conditions.

On the one hand there is the cultural issue where you see children starting very young to have these activities [work]. From my point of view, this is something that shouldn't exist. The government should have created mechanisms to improve parent's employment, making adult employment exist and making the adult see work for little ones as bad, that instead we need to give children care and protection. So it is a very clear but very difficult issue, because beyond the cultural issue there are the [basic] needs which make a child work. (Asked to stay anonymous, Member of an international NGO).

There are exceptions, of course. One interviewee talks about how UNATSBO draws from Bolivia's deeper "culture of social organization":

Bolivia has a very, very strong and always has had a strong sense of union and organization. There are many, many studies on that. [They have] organizations for basically everything. [...] And there are things that for me as a Westerner, it's really, really odd that that they have for instance the organization of illegal car owners, it's very contradictory (Laughs) But they exist! They exist and they did a huge strike because the government now said 'Listen, you know even though you live in the countryside and far away from the civilization in Bolivia, you need to have number plates on your cars, you need to pay these taxes, otherwise you can't have insurance on your cars.' But they made a huge strike and they blocked roads and because of that... but it is very strong, the sense of organizing is strong. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of an international organization).

The adult collaborators and child leaders of UNATSBO, however, along with members of other NGOs, talk about culture as a container, a culture that is hard to change and that reflects deep differences between social groups, differences that make people's lives meaningful.

I think based on my own life experience and my work here in Bolivia that culture here is different, that our view of work is different than the Marxist, European conception of work, where work is the transformation of matter to generate capital and all that. Here there is also a cultural syncretism where work also represents a collective construction, of values, it is also a cultural construction. Meaning that in the indigenous communities, community work is daily and [through it people] transfer the love and cooperation between families. And it also teaches you fundamental things [that will be useful] the rest of your life (Adrian Piejko, Lawyer and adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

Some UNATSBO leaders emphasize the unchanging nature of culture and how working children are following traditions from time immemorial.

We are making a great contribution to society and to culture itself, because since before the Incas [children have] worked to survive and to eat. (Juan David, National representative of UNATSBO).

Sociologically, both views are incorrect: culture is never just a superficial veneer, culture is never a fixed, hermetic box. Culture is a deep set of categories and codes that are made and unmade through action, more language than surface or container (Alexander and Smith 2010; Wherry 2012). But, empirically, these views help us see why translators in each group have a hard time understanding each other. They aren't talking about the same thing. They aren't giving culture the same importance.

Nevertheless, one thing they *do* agree on is that their culture is local, rural, indigenous. When I ask about culture almost all interviewees begin to speak about indigenous communities. Culture, in their eyes, is almost inseparable from ethnicity.

Here there is a strong presence of the Indigenous movement. That has been toned down a bit but it is still very important. And [in indigenous communities] work is part of the family and the community, child work is also going on in these communities. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of an international organization).

I think a cultural aspect is definitely relevant. [...] For instance, in Aymara the three principles of life are you can't lie, you can't you commit murder, and you can't be lazy. And they've lived by that [...], it's very, very different in terms of culture. It influences how they look at things like climate change and these whole negotiations are completely different, or gender also. They have a completely different perspective than we Westerners have. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of an international organization)

It is part of the Aymara culture. For instance, in Quechua there is no word for “work,” there are only determined actions like to sow, to harvest, to pick. These are actions. So there is no idea of work or no work, because they are activities of the daily routine. For them [indigenous Bolivians], it is a formative activity that prepares [children] for their adult life, all children have responsibilities according to their age. In rural and Amazonian regions they prepare them for activities like hunting, but through games. That conception of work as a torture or that it is hard to work does not exist among them, because for them it is a part of life. (Isbel Flores, Coordinator of Sarantañani Trabajador, adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

Merry (2006) finds something similar in her research on international human rights meetings on violence against women. She describes “a whiff of the notion of the primitive” (10) in how actors talk about culture: “It is not what modern urbanites do but what governs life in the countryside. [...] Transnational elites often located culture ‘out there’ in villages and rural areas rather than ‘in here’ in their offices and conference rooms. Culture more often describes the developing world than the developed one” (11). The same is true in Bolivia. Almost none of the interviewees in international organizations recognize global ideas about child labor, much less their own work, as “culture.” Some interviewees in UNATSBO do talk about “Western culture” but again this is described as monolithic and unchanging, just like Andean culture.

These assumptions influence how these translators translate. On the one hand, members of international organizations and some NGOs think that they need to displace culture, let people celebrate local traditions but teach them the truth about child labor. On the other hand, translators in other NGOs and UNATSBO think that one cultural container will necessarily clash against another, they believe that the government has to pick one, prioritize one. These actors sometimes justify existing practices by pointing to the timelessness of culture. And while proponents of “surface culture” overstate people’s agency, proponents of “container culture” minimize it. Once

again, they aren't talking about the same thing, making it difficult for these actors to agree on how to translate global norms against child labor.

Untangling C138's intertextuality

In this chapter I have shown how different actors translate C138. Although they agree on several aspects of child labor they disagree on C138 in particular, on what the minimum age for employment should be. For members of international organizations, the minimum age should be 14, in accordance with C138. For members of children's rights NGOs, the answer is more complicated and this is the wrong question. Most of these interviewees would rather talk about how we can fight the worst forms of child labor or better support working children day-to-day. And for the child leaders and adult collaborators of UNATSBO the minimum age should depend on the child's situation, it can be 14 or it can be lower, 8 or 10.

I have also shown that underneath each position towards C138 there are different institutional loyalties and assumptions about law, knowledge, and culture. Many interviewees talk past each other and cannot imagine reaching a consensus, in part because they are talking about different things. They disagree, in short, because their ideas about what "counts" as a good translation are different.

But even though they draw on different assumptions, even though they disagree on the minimum age, all translators work with the same global texts. Cultural brokers defend their position towards C138 – for, against, or ambiguous – by citing not only local cultural norms but also the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. They all claim to be upholding this international document and defending children's rights. The ILO (2017) has written that the CRC, C138, and C182 "emphasize that freedom from child labor is a human right and that the elimination of child labor is a universal and fundamental value" (19). Cussiánovich (2010), in contrast, argues that the CRC alone is part of "a long struggle for the dignity of peoples" (12) and that it has been "contorted by ideologies contrary to the spirit of the CRC and of children's own rights" (21). For regional and

global actors, the CRC and C138 are either compatible or incompatible. The same is true in Bolivia. I find that actors emphasize different aspects of the CRC: some give more weight to protection rights, others to participation rights.

Members of international organizations and some NGOs focus on children's *protection rights*. They approach questions of child labor by asking how to best keep children safe from harm. They talk about abuse, effects on children's health, and even death in their answers.

Do you think that making bricks, that that dust, that dust in your lungs, no matter how 'dignified' you call it, is that good for your health? If there is a cave-in [in a mine] and that kills him [the child], is that, would you call that... (she breaks off). That whole dignity thing is just a fairytale ("*puro cuento*"), their health is on the line! (Maria Gracia Morais, Legal expert and adviser to UNICEF).

The logic behind [Evo Morales' position] is that Evo was a former child worker and his logic is that you can get to be president of the country being a child worker. But, I mean, how many children become president? And how many don't get an education or whatever? And how many *die* during the process? I mean, it's not equivalent, not at all. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of an international organization).

Children, in this view, are profoundly vulnerable. And, while the interviewees do mention concerns for education, for leisure, for development and growth, their main concern is the possibility of harm. They oppose UNATSBO because they believe the movement is overlooking this very real possibility. Some go farther, calling UNATSBO and its supporters callous.

Aren't we ashamed? How is our face not on fire when we say that the state can't, the family can't, and as a society we also can't [protect children]? And so let the child be screwed working for 8 hours, that can't be! It's because as adults we don't manage to get the [children's] rights approach in our heads! I'm co-responsible for guaranteeing these children's rights, damn it! So put a host program for children with mothers with cancer, to give an example. No? So let's look for homes, not institutions but families selected to temporarily host these children while their mother is in the hospital and all that. [...] What do I do with a kid who doesn't have a mother? Two things: or I put him up for adoption or I institutionalize him, there isn't anything else. Not throw him on the streets and force him to work! Come on! (Maria Gracia Morais, Legal expert and adviser to UNICEF).

In describing children, these interviewees talk about children's size, defenselessness, and the state's obligation to protect.

So there aren't any work inspectors, so the State says 'ok, thank you, so the child must work.' That's putting on the back of a child – a child that has a shoulder this size, that is 20 cm from here to here – all the weight of that inertia, everyone's inertia! That isn't fair! [...] A little shoulder like that carrying all the weight of all the world's inertia! (Maria Gracia Morais, Legal expert and adviser to UNICEF).

Members of international organizations and some NGOs defend C138 because a minimum age lower than 14 leaves more children exposed to danger. They defend C138 because it helps guarantee children's protection rights. For these interviewees, labor – as opposed to light work – is harmful for “priceless” children, it is an attack against their right to education and affection.

Members of other NGOs and UNATSBO, in contrast, emphasize children's *participation rights*.

They approach child labor by saying we should listen to working children first.

For me the understanding these young people have about the right to work is also the result of NGOs in the region and elsewhere who have empowered young people and made them capable to make their own decisions, made them capable of defending their rights [and] beliefs, and that allows them to be social actors in the world. So, after working through that process of empowering young people, they say something and we don't like it? We can't say that, that would be like undervaluing what they are saying [...] We can't say we don't want to listen to them because what they say goes against the majority (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of an international NGO).

While these interviewees don't emphasize children's vulnerability they still think that children are different from adults, better than adults in their innocent wisdom. One interviewee tells the following story to illustrate this point:

There were some terrible debates [between adult collaborators] and so the [child] leaders had the right decision of telling everyone to leave, all the adults. So we all left and only the children stayed and we had wasted almost an hour and a half with that discussion and when they were alone it took them only fifteen minutes [to decide]. And everyone was so happy because they came to an agreement. We hugged and [realized] we agree on the fundamental issues, so we hugged and nothing else happened. (Adrian Piejko, Lawyer and adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

Another translator makes the same argument in discussing the ideal child leader:

He has to be genuine, he has to be spontaneous, that what he says be something he has recognized from his life. He has to be someone who doesn't make things up, doesn't only talk about things he's read... Someone might tell him, 'Go, read this,' but he is capable of saying 'You know, this is wrong. I won't say what you want me to say because this isn't

what I have lived.' So they have to be... it's genuineness, spontaneity, being genuine (Cristobal Gonzalez, educator from Fundación AVE, adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

Several international children's rights NGOs have explicitly invested in fostering children's participation in Bolivia, although not exclusively for working children.

The program supported working children so that they could organize better, so that they could have better levels of participation, that was the focus. It wasn't just about working children, though. We worked with different groups. In this case, the program had as its goal indigenous children and working children because that was what interested the financier. (Viviana Farfan, National Coordinator of Child Protection, Save the Children).

And when existing organizations don't exist, NGOs create them.

We have managed to create some child committees [with children] from 10 years-old to 17. They are part of these committees and have a close relationship with municipal activities. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of an international NGO).

These actors disagree with international organizations, therefore, not because they think children shouldn't be protected but because they believe participation rights also matter.

Our relationship [with international organizations] isn't so good, we clash over some things. We always say that they should try to get children to participate but no, [they say] you can't give your opinion, you can't say anything. [...] Because the ILO has asked that the new law be declared unconstitutional because of the treaties with them that supposedly were being broken, because they always talk about work as exploitation. UNICEF follows the same line, they are against child labor, they call it child labor but for us it's just work, there's no need to distinguish. (Liz Castro, National representative of UNATSBO).

Some even say that child labor laws are in fact harming children, that lowering the minimum age is a form of protection.

The international community [...] wants to impose a model that might work in other places but here it's different. When you try to eradicate child labor you victimize the children, because when one eradicates labor one doesn't think of the lack of policies for these children, one thinks of children who are on the street, children in bad conditions. [...] Bolivia doesn't have a budget for childhood. (Cristobal Gonzalez, educator from Fundación AVE, adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

As mentioned above, almost all interviewees agree on the benefits of light work and the undesirability of exploitation and the worst forms of child labor. They disagree only on street work and the minimum age for work, partly because in discussing these activities they focus on different

examples. Members of international organizations and some NGOs talk about extreme examples – death and abuse and cave-ins in mines. Leaders and collaborators of UNATSBO and most other NGOs, however, talk about working children as politically and socially empowered actors. They don't talk so much of their work but of their activism, they often shift conversations about child labor to child participation in social movements.

The first time I saw [a former UNATSBO leader] he was the representative of the adolescent miners. He was shy and almost didn't talk. But in UNATSBO he developed an incredible capacity to express himself and by the end when I saw him talking to politicians, I said it's incredible how these spaces have helped not so much for personal development but with that social commitment and finding other working children and adolescents and feeling identification. (Adrian Piejko, Lawyer and adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

The movement was a defining process in the lives of every one of us. We have seen that there are other opportunities in life, that you can make a clean cut from vicious cycles. [...] The movement, at a personal level and from what I've shared with other ex-working children, has helped us discover we have abilities, we have human rights, has helped us discover we are people with dignity, our work has helped us find that dignity and has made it possible [for us] to change our lives. Because stories tend to repeat themselves, you know? So it's like there is an alcoholic parent, an alcoholic, son, grandson... So it's about doing a clean cut and saying no and recognizing our rights. The movement is what has helped me be where I am. Without it I would probably be a single mother with eight children and beaten, what do I know? (Gladys Sarmiento, former leader of UNATSBO).

Still, when I ask a former UNATSBO leader whether she thinks it is *work* or the *movement* that brings children dignity, she says:

For me work does bring dignity. I respect and value the work of children. But I'm conscious that there are conditions that are terrible. I think that what you have to do is change work or improve the conditions. But work, work helps you. Because look, if you put together a group of working children who are ten, let's say, with another group of children who don't [work] and have the same age, you are going to realize their level of maturity, their sense of responsibility, the sense of valuing things. (Gladys Sarmiento, former leader of UNATSBO).

Work, in other words, is a form of participation, a way of acting in and impacting society. What is more, work teaches children, empowers children, grants them a sense of self-worth. For this and other UNATSBO interviewees work is *not* incompatible with education and affection. It is a gateway to education, it is a source of affection, for oneself and one's peers. So, again, the

translators disagree because they aren't talking about the same thing. They read the same global text, the CRC, but like all texts it is open to several different readings.

At the start of this chapter I asked how translators interpreted and transformed C138 into the local context. I find that they do so in different ways, drawing on (a) their institutional loyalties, (b) their translational norms, and (c) their reading of other international texts they create an argument for, against, or ambiguous towards C138. In the process, all translators translate the idea of "priceless" children. They all agree that children embody innocence, that they lack the guile and corruption of adulthood. But, by emphasizing different parts of the CRC they are emphasizing different aspects of the priceless representation. For those who defend C138, children are fundamentally vulnerable, their innocence makes them targets for harm and abuse. For those who oppose C138, children are fundamentally resilient, their innocence makes them wise "truth-tellers" and potential saviors of society.

No translator says that people should value children based on their productivity alone, no broker reverts to what Zelizer called the "productive" view of childhood. They all uphold the globally-institutionalized idea that children's value is incalculable, that children are sacred and should occupy "a special and separate world, regulated by affection and education" (Zelizer 1985: 209). They differ on how street work fits into this sacred world. For members of international organizations and some NGOs it doesn't, street work corrupts and harms children. For members of other NGOs and some members of governments it shouldn't, but unfortunately it does. And for other members of government and the spokespeople of UNATSBO, street work can become an extension of children's special world: if children are not exploited, if we learn to respect and recognize working children, if we grant them room in political discussions over child labor, then street work can be a space for education and affection.

Chapter five: Performing the priceless child

At least three groups of cultural brokers translate C138: members of international organizations, children's rights NGOs, and the leaders and adult collaborators of UNATSBO. But their work doesn't end with translation, they then have to convince their audience – Bolivian government officials – that their translation, and only theirs, is factually and morally correct. In this chapter, I show how one group managed to do this more effectively than the others. UNATSBO convinced the Bolivian government to change the law and lower the minimum age for employment ironically by performing danger narratives of “pricelessness,” by emphasizing children's vulnerability and the state's responsibility to protect them.

Several scholars have compared social life to theatrical performances. Goffman (1959) said that people present different versions of the self in and through interactions. Turner (1974, 1986) wrote that people experience social life through stories and social drama. And Alexander (2004) argues that people communicate meanings within fragmented societies by drawing on shared background representations, interpreting shared scripts, and performing authenticity for a close or distant audience¹⁵. By calling social life theatre, these scholars aren't making a normative claim. They don't believe that social life is immoral and fake or that people are manipulative and don't believe in their roles. Rather, Alexander (2011) writes: “authenticity is an interpretive category rather than an ontological state. The status of authenticity is arrived at, is contingent, and results from processes of social construction” (13). In other words, to ask whether or not a performance is “real” is to ask the wrong question. It is more important to ask whether a performance is “effective.”

Therefore, scholars compare social life to theatre because performance studies provide tools to better understand the hidden dynamics of culture. Performance theory invites us to look for

¹⁵ A more detailed discussion of the theoretical differences between Goffman, Turner, and Alexander exceeds the scope of this paper.

actors, representations, texts, scripts, stages, staging, sets, props, means of production, social power, and intended (and unintended) audiences (Alexander 2004: 530-533). This allows us to move beyond simplistic assumptions about how individuals and groups create and share meaning. Social life is more than just the expression of material interests or the reproduction of power. People who have more money and power are more likely to create successful performances – they have the resources to put on a “good show” – but they still have to make their performance compelling, they still have to make their acting seem natural, they still have to convince an audience of “Others” to identify with and feel for them (531). That is why across cultures seemingly powerless groups have managed to tell poignant stories, stage compelling drama, and change people’s minds, behaviors, and institutions. If culture is a language, then people use performances to bring this language to life.

Scholars have used performance theory to study political elections (Alexander 2010), political debates (Jacobs and Sobieraj 2007), political assassinations (Eyerman 2008), social movements (Kern 2009; Smith and Howe 2015), collective memory (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991), the media (Norton 2011), tourism (West 2008), neighborhood branding (Wherry 2011), artistic competitions (McCormick 2009), markets (Wherry 2012), material culture (Woodward 2007), power (Reed 2013), and even social science itself (Reed and Alexander 2009). In this chapter, I use performance theory to understand childhood, child labor, and how working children in Bolivia managed to change national law.

We have already talked about the actors involved – international organizations, children’s rights NGOs, and UNATSBO. In what follows, I focus on the latter, on how this organization managed to change the status quo. I argue that they had an audience of one: President Evo Morales. UNATSBO representatives always explicitly wanted to meet with and convince Morales, since he had been a working child and since he had the power to then influence the Bolivian government more broadly. I show how at first UNATSBO pulled from their movement’s scripts, trying to present children as political actors in order to gain the President’s attention. However, during the

performance their role, their “character,” changed. The Bolivian police responded to an UNATSBO protest the way the police often responds to protests, aggressively dispersing the crowd by using force and tear gas. But when the police did this, UNATSBO actors’ role shifted, they no longer embodied political performers but “priceless children.” And by changing their performance – influencing and influenced by other people’s interpretation of their performance – UNATSBO got the President’s attention, earning a seat at the negotiating table. This relatively powerless group garnered cultural, moral power.

The precedent

The 2013 march was not the first time UNATSBO tried to convince the Bolivian government and the broader Bolivian society to adopt their translation. UNATSBO was formed in 2003 and since its inception the organization has been interested in changing public perceptions of working children. According one of UNATSBO’s original leaders, the union’s earliest goals were more modest.

We would give [children] a credential showing that they are now part of [Cochabamba’s chapter of UNATSBO]. We also made vests and looked for ways that society could see that we were a working child and not a thief, like they usually say. (Gladys Sarmiento, former UNATSBO leader).

The union created uniforms so that people could identify and see working children. They wanted to make the children visible as organized workers, to counteract representations of working children as delinquent or potentially dangerous.

With the 2006 election of Evo Morales, however, the union’s mission changed. As mentioned in chapter two, Morales is the first indigenous president of Bolivia and his political party, MAS (“Movement to Socialism”¹⁶), won elections by an overwhelming majority, allowing Morales to control Congress and the Senate (Harten 2011: 88). Morales immediately used this

¹⁶ In Spanish, “*Movimiento al Socialismo*.”

power to call for a constitutional assembly. The MAS party won the majority of seats, allowing the party to direct most of the constitutional changes. The new constitution combines human rights ideals with traditional indigenous values (Harten 2011: 220). It combines Western legal models with local ideas of communal justice and ownership (212). And the new constitution draws from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and guarantees the “superior interest of the child and adolescent” (Article 60). As one member of government explained:

It was the first time in our constitution, in all the history of Bolivia, that [the constitution] broadens the part on fundamental rights, the catalogue of rights, to include children. [...] For instance, there now are specific rights for families and also very specific rights for children. That inclusion in my opinion is fundamental because now we consider children’s rights as fundamental rights, we no longer see [children] as objects but as subjects. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of government).

The new constitution was approved by general election in 2009 (Morales 2011). The Republic of Bolivia was “refounded” as the Plurinational State of Bolivia (Harten 2011: 202).

Article 61 of the constitution deals with the question of child labor. This article is closer to the CRC’s wording of child labor than the ILO Conventions 138 or 182. It prohibits “child exploitation or forced labor” as opposed to “child labor.” It allows for “activities done by boys, girls, and adolescents in the familial and social framework,” as long as they are “oriented towards their integral formation as citizens and have a formative function” (Article 61, Paragraph II). The Constitution also states that children’s “rights, guarantees, and institutional protection mechanisms are object of special regulation” (Article 61, Paragraph II).

The leaders and adult collaborators of UNATSBO claim responsibility for article 61. Movement members marched, they attended municipal discussion tables, they participated in national discussion forums. One adult collaborator, Adrian Piejko, explains:

In 2008 or 2007, when [the government] was debating the new political constitution, some strategic allies [in the assembly] communicated with UNATSBO and said, ‘Kids, UNICEF is very strong in here, putting in the issue of eradicating all forms of child labor,’ so in response to that the children started to organize and in that process they generate the first strong mobilization of UNATSBO and that’s why in article 61 the State says that it will

avoid exploitation but will recognize the educational value that child labor can have. (Adrian Piejko, Lawyer and adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

A former child leader, Gladys Sarmiento, adds:

The objective then and still today is [to make members of government] respect the rights of working children and adolescents specifically, [to make them] value our work, because we live in an adult-centric world. (Gladys Sarmiento, former UNATSBO leader).

When I ask Gladys what she means by “valuing work,” she talks about respect and she talks about equal pay.

When [adults] see a kid, working or not working, playing, wasting time, lounging around, they don’t take him seriously. And so they don’t pay him what they should pay him, the ones who work independently and dependently too. (Gladys Sarmiento, former UNATSBO leader).

Although the leaders of UNATSBO weren’t able to introduce more specific questions about respect or payment into constitutional discussions, they were, in Gladys’ opinion, able to make working children visible.

In the political constitution, article 60 and 61 were reformulated so that now it talks about no child being exploited, mistreated, what have you. That was the achievement of all that process. The constitution now shows that [working children] exist, it visibilizes working children, for us that was a step up. [...] Because in the previous constitution working children aren’t there, they don’t exist. But in this one they’re there, they exist. We had to go through all that to get this (Gladys Sarmiento, former UNATSBO leader).

For Gladys, these articles in the new constitution are UNATSBO’s triumph.

Some members of the Bolivian government agree. According to one interviewee from the Ministry of Justice:

Our state’s political constitution [...] was approved after a great discussion and a participative process where the people as a whole have participated, in neighborhoods, through assemblymen. [...] Children participated with their own proposals, working children and adolescents with their proposals to approve this constitution. So when they saw that the assemblymen were collecting the opinions of women, of the people in general... You found people in the party, in opposition parties, some assemblymen said ‘I’m a father and I wouldn’t allow my children to work.’ [But the children said] ‘You’re an assemblymen and not my parent, only by working can we learn to defend ourselves because if we don’t [work] than our rights will surely be violated.’ Children with eight little

years said this, today they must be 11 or 12 (Ana Bazán, Responsible for the transversalization of the rights of children in the Ministry of Justice).

Others, however, disagree. The constitution in their view doesn't side with UNATSBO's request to reconsider child labor.

In our constitution [we talk about] family work, meaning that if the parents are artisans that would be family work and would be a form of learning for the child. In the communities, for example, you see this and that is protected by the constitution. It would be something else if the child would have to work out of obligation and that becomes a matter of necessity. But if in family work the child is a participant, that can't be considered a work that violates the integrity of the child. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of government).

The Bolivian government, in other words, has always been divided in its position towards UNATSBO, towards child labor, towards different translations of C138. These different positions would come to a head in 2013, as the government rewrote its childhood law.

The march

Once Bolivia changed its constitution, it had to update its laws, including its laws on childhood. The previous law on childhood, No. 2026, had been approved in 1999 during the presidency of former dictator Hugo Banzer.¹⁷ This law set the minimum age for employment at fourteen but included a transitory disposition that undermined that minimum age, effectively allowing work at any age.

[The law] stated that work is only after fourteen [but] included a transitional article that stated that work will be eradicated, but while there is poverty [the government] will continue protecting children, but transitionally. But we never know when we are going to end poverty, it was contradictory, it didn't have a minimum age, there was no regulation or work, that is to say hours you can work or how I will protect you from being exploited. (Ana Bazán, Responsible for the transversalization of the rights of children in the Ministry of Justice).

They say that the new code legalizes the participation, the incorporation of children [to work] starting at age ten, etc. I say that that is not true. Because the previous code was

¹⁷ Banzer was a military dictator from 1971 to 1978 and a democratically elected president from 1997 to 2001.

much worse in that sense. (Opens the code to show me.) Article 2 in the transitory dispositions – and this is what the ILO has to get inside its head, and UNICEF too – says: ‘The state through the corresponding institutions must implement public policies to progressively eradicate the work of boys, girls, and adolescents under the age of fourteen. Meanwhile, to all workers under the age of fourteen – with no minimum age! – the same protections and dispositions expected for adolescent workers shall be applied.’ [...] It wasn’t a gap! It was legal! It was institutionalized! And this is the previous code published by UNICEF (Laughs.). (Jorge Domic, Director of Fundación La Paz, Adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

The law, therefore, stated that as long as there is poverty, children are allowed to work under the age of 14. Still, as the government planned to update the childhood law, child labor was not an issue on the agenda.

The Ministry of Justice proposed the new childhood law. According to one member of government, there initially weren’t any substantive changes to the previous code, so other ministries and offices began drafting proposals. The government asked UNICEF for support and UNICEF contacted María Gracia Morais. Morais was a retired legal scholar who had consulted for UNICEF and had helped draft the childhood laws of Venezuela, Ecuador, and El Salvador. Coincidentally, she now lived in Bolivia, so she agreed to work with government officials, with the constitutional commission within the legislative assembly. She remembers:

The time limit was until December, from October to December, because the President had promised this as a gift to the children. When the project got to [a member of the commission’s] hands she said ‘No, this can’t go,’ because of the structure, because of the language, because of the content. [...] So she saw this and said ‘What do we do? Let’s ask UNICEF for advice.’ So through UNICEF they got to me and they told me and I said yes. The girl was right, this had no heads or tails, the only salvageable part was related to the penal [code]. So the first thing I said was ‘Let me read this and how much time do we have.’ With the whole process we only had twenty days, so I said send me an assistant and so she came to see what was wrong and I said, everything is wrong. (Maria Gracia Morais, Legal expert and adviser to UNICEF).

Morais remembers working on a new proposal in record time and travelling to La Paz to defend it in front of Congress. When she presented the new proposal to UNICEF and the constitutional commission she recalls a “gloomy discussion.”

It was a good team but it was so politicized, because everything we said had to be discussed at night with the senator, with the delegate, with the boss, and the next day they would say ‘No, we can’t do that.’ For example, health, we said that the State would cover [health] until age 18, but no, the State can only cover until age five, so we had to change. Poor Natalia was trying to convince everyone, saying ‘How can this be, if we say that children are going to be a priority, but in the next article we say that we can’t provide health coverage because there’s no money, so where is the coherence? So where is the responsible society.’ (Maria Gracia Morais, Legal expert and adviser to UNICEF).

Morais and government officials pushed on, trying to make as many changes as possible. But they weren’t the only actors – translators – interested in influencing the new childhood law.

UNATSBO wanted to intercede here as well and both child leaders and adult collaborators were also busy drafting a proposed law. With the support of the NGOs Save the Children, Terre des Hommes Switzerland, and Terre des Hommes Germany, organization leaders spent several months in 2010 touring Bolivia, polling working children, holding workshops, and systematizing their findings. These efforts produced *Mi Fortaleza es mi Trabajo* (“My Strength is my Work”), a book that presents working children’s “perceptions and demands.” Working children, the book states, want to be recognized legally, politically, and socially, want access to quality education that makes room for work, and want the state to support and strengthen working children organizations (UNATSBO 2010: 87-88). The book ends with draft bill based on the ideas of working children, one that does *not* include a minimum age for employment (UNATSBO 2010: 109-131).

Adrian Piejko was a law student at this time and helped the organization write this draft law. It took “four to five months” before the movement began its political incidence in 2011.

I accompanied them [working children] for another five or six months. Then I was astonished by the working children and adolescents’ capacity for dialogue and expression, starting from showing their proposal to politicians. I was super nervous because this was my first time in this formal manner, but when I saw Ernesto, who was 17 years old, and how he went in and wrapped and unwrapped the representatives... I only intervened in the technical matters, but in the political matters and in the proposals it was the kids. (Adrian Piejko, Lawyer and adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

The movement’s strategy, in many ways, was to openly challenge existing cultural expectations of childhood, with knowledgeable, eloquent leaders presenting their demands to government just like

in “any other” social movement. UNATSBO didn’t want the working children to be treated like “children,” like fragile, innocent, and a-political beings. The children went to government forums, presented their legal document, sent letters and petitions to President Evo Morales himself.

The Bolivian government – the intended audience – rejected this performance. Piejko recalls how politicians were exasperated by UNATSBO leaders’ insistence.

All of 2012, when the State starts to elaborate the Code for Boys, Girls, and Adolescents, [...] there were proposals from children and adolescents who participated, not only working children. [But] it was a debate only of adults [who discussed] children’s issues. But they don’t know what is best for children, so [the working children] started looking for places to debate. Many were kicked out [from a debate] in Potosí, but the children convened a meeting to talk anyway. There [the politicians] told them ‘No, you can’t participate,’ they were annoyed. But the children said ‘You’re talking about us, how are we not going to participate?’ So [politicians] said ‘We are going to do more particular events just for children,’ but [the working children] said that they didn’t want just children, they wanted to be there with the adults to discuss. (Adrian Piejko, Lawyer and adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

The government reluctantly opened a space for the working children, but, according to Piejko and UNATSBO leaders, it was a mere symbolic gesture,

After that, after the participation of the children, none of their proposals was taken into account. So we got to 2013... (Adrian Piejko, Lawyer and adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

They wanted to approve the law, the code, without taking our opinions into account. [...] We sent letters, we asked for audiences, all of that, but they didn’t listen. When they brought us there to supposedly participate it was only to listen and if you said anything they wouldn’t pay attention and wouldn’t do anything. (Liz Salazar, former leader of UNATSBO).

According to Maria Gracia Morais, in contrast, UNATSBO leaders refused multiple invitations to serious discussions.

One day, after one of these discussions, I came down around 9 pm to go to the hotel and everything was truncated [with traffic], there was a bus crossed in the street and we couldn’t go out. There were people upstairs, delegates, one man goes with me to help me go out and we run into a kid, he was already an adult, and he said that we’re discussing a law without taking working children into account. But that isn’t true, we extended multiple invitations but they never came and we can’t just paralyze this. (Maria Gracia Morais, Legal expert and adviser to UNICEF).

One way or the other, the movement's political performance didn't work.

By 2013, the legislative assembly presented a final draft of the childhood law. The new law made many changes to previous legislation – for instance it granted adopted children the right to meet their parents, it established new protections from sexual assault, it updated the definition of infanticide, and it recognized children's right to participate, to organize, and to make petitions (Nuevo Sur 2013) – but it did not change its stance on child labor. On the contrary, it erased the previous law's open-ended transitory dispositions and established 14 as the minimum age for employment, in accordance with ILO standards (Nuevo Sur 2013). And not only did President Evo Morales approve of the law and its goals, he urged the Legislative Assembly and the Senate to pass the law quickly. He wanted this law to be ratified on December 25, 2013, as the government's "Christmas gift" for Bolivian children (La Razón 2013).

The children of UNATSBO did not want this gift. On June 12, 2013, on the World Day Against Child Labor, members of UNATSBO marched towards the presidential palace to present their proposals. Although they met with three legislators – Eugenio Rojas, Rhina Aguirre, and Martha Poma – the children were unsatisfied. As one marcher told journalists: "We sent the President (Evo Morales) a letter. We want to meet with him. Then we would take his word because he once said that he was a working child too and that when he was little he herded llamas" (El País 2013). Morales, however, did not receive the working children. The bill kept its minimum age. Other organizations, like NGOs that help abandoned or orphaned children, were also unsuccessful in their efforts to influence the bill.

By December 17, legislators had approved the bill, under the leadership of Javier Zavaleta, the president of the Parliamentary Network for Childhood (El Día 2013). Two thirds of the MAS party in Congress voted in favor of the law (Nuevo Sur 2013). Now the law had to be debated in the Senate.

On December 18, 2013, about fifty working children and adolescents and a handful of adult collaborators marched towards the presidential palace again. They carried cardboard banners and many wore blue vests with the name of their local movement or a supporting NGO or foundation.

It was a normal march, like the student marches. All the kids went, chanting their chants. Several television cameras were recording them. [...] When we headed the march the working children said ‘What we ask for is the protection of working children’s rights, we want our rights to be respected.’ (Isbel Flores, Coordinator of Sarantañani Trabajador, adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

I couldn’t be there but several kids traveled from all the [local] movements to La Paz. There they marched peacefully, even some artists in the group prepared sketch [comedies] and theatre and things like that to show their demands. (Gladys Sarmiento, former UNATSBO leader).

This time, however, the marchers did not reach plaza Murillo, La Paz’s central square. On the corner of Potosi and Ayacucho streets, one block away from the government buildings, twenty policemen gear set up a metal barrier.

The children and adolescents pressed against the barrier, yelling, chanting, raising their banners. A few even tried to climb over. Then someone threw a rock – the police later claimed that it was the adults (Zapana 2013b), the children later claimed that it was “infiltrated” children (Zapana 2013a). In any case, the police reacted aggressively. They threw children to the ground, under the barrier, they arrested adolescents, they covered the crowd with tear gas.

This event shifted the working children’s performance. Suddenly, their vulnerability, their “pricelessness” was on display, front-and-center. Interviewees describe the march emphasizing the specialness of children. The police’s actions were egregious not because they were excessive, but because they were excessive and used against children.

We tried to get into the plaza and the police comes out. We tried to go in but they wouldn’t let us. **As kids we should have gone through** but they wouldn’t let us and that’s when the give and take with police began and that’s when they threw tear gas on us. (Liz Salazar, former leader of UNATSBO).

They wanted to go into Plaza Murillo but there the police wouldn’t let them through and they threw tear gas. To *children!* And that news was heard around the world. They beat

them, they threw tear gas, and there were children as young as 5! Adults, the few collaborators who were there, but the rest were *children and adolescents*! And when they saw that, they youngsters, of 15, 16, 17, well they reacted and went against the police saying **‘We’re children! What is wrong with you?’** It was terrible, terrible. (Gladys Sarmiento, former UNATSBO leader).

At that time, was Javier Zavaleta who wanted the law to be approved, so you heard in the protest children yelling ‘Down with Zavaleta!’ There were children that said to the policemen to let them through because they just wanted to talk, **that they wouldn’t do anything else, that they’re just children.** But the police wouldn’t let them through so they got angry and started to struggle with the police, three children got over and the police caught up with them, apprehended them, there was tear gas. (Asked to remain anonymous, Adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

News cameras and reporters arrived to the scene and found children beaten, with their eyes red and swollen. One girl had fainted and was taken to the hospital. Other children threatened a hunger strike. Some demanded Javier Zavaleta’s resignation (La Razón 2013). UNATSBO adult collaborators remember:

They tried to get to the [Presidential] Palace but they wouldn’t let them through. So they closed everything and the children started to climb over the barriers and so they threw tear gas, those images went around the world! It was in all the media. (Isbel Flores, Coordinator of Sarantañani Trabajador, adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

Too many journalists were taking pictures as the kids fought against the police. When everything calmed down they made a bonfire with their banners, it was an interesting march. (Asked to remain anonymous, Adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

That same afternoon, newspapers around the country published the same article on the march, each showing different pictures of wide-eyed children facing towering policemen in riot gear.

Public outrage followed. Child welfare organizations, politicians, and the Church released statements condemning the police’s actions. The Ombudsman talked about the need to listen to working children’s and adolescents’ opinions (La Patria 2013). The President of the Permanent Assembly of Human Rights of La Paz said that “tear gassing working children is an offense that violates the little one’s human rights” (Página Siete 2013). The representative of the Ombudsman’s office in Oruro condemned the police, calling their actions a “grave excess” and saying that “it isn’t

fair that we touch the most fragile, the most defenseless, in this case children and adolescents” (La Patria 2013). Some interviewees still get angry remembering the incident.

That’s when we all pronounced ourselves, that just cannot be! We can agree or disagree on child labor, but that cannot be. You can’t tear gas children! You are violating all their rights, starting with the right to life, because you are putting their life at risk when you tear gas them. So thanks to the march, the government received them and sat down with them, listened to them, and the fruit of that was the code. (Julia Velasco, Coordinator of the National News Agency for the Rights of Children).

The interpretation of the event was clear: these weren’t “organized workers,” “political activists,” “just like adults.” These were innocent, vulnerable, sacred children. The Bolivian police often treats adult protestors the way it treated these children, only a few years later the police also quelled a protest of handicapped marchers with tear gas (La Razón 2016). But in treating the marching children as adults, the police unintentionally underscored the marchers’ status children. The marchers gained power by invoking, portraying the globally-institutionalized, globally-circulating “priceless” view of childhood.

The aftermath

A few hours after the incident, politicians began to make public statements. Zavaleta told reporters he would ask the police for a report and he urged officers to always remember that those “under 18 require ‘certain care’ in these types of situation” (La Razón 2013). He still defended the proposed law: “As the state we guarantee adolescents who work from age 14 all their rights. [And] from (age) 12 to 14 as well, the only difference is that they will work with their parents’ or a government agency’s express authorization” (El Día 2013).

Gabriela Montaña, then President of the Senate, gave a press conference in Plaza Murillo. She also asked everyone to stay calm, saying she would postpone the Senate debate. Unlike Zavaleta, she was open to change. Speaking of Morales, she said: “The President knows that you are concerned over this issue and we will listen to you. We still have not approved the law in the Senate and we ask you not to get ahead of yourselves. There’s still time to talk to debate” (La Patria

2013). Montaña agreed to meet with UNATSBO representatives if they called off further demonstrations and protests.

The government's swift response contained the scandal. According to one NGO employee:

[The march] didn't make a bigger dent in civil society because the kids are highly combative but also because there was an immediate reaction on the part of the legislators, 'Come, let's sit and talk.' (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of an international NGO).

Some interviewees speculate that the government was worried about the potential scandal's effect on upcoming elections.

There was a shift in 2013, because the children crucified themselves in front of the Government Palace. [...] There was an electoral opposition in Bolivia in 2013 so the government of Evo Morales was worried of not making much political noise. [And] having children crucified in front of the Government Palace is not very good PR given that they were only a few weeks away from elections. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of an international organization).

For these interviewees, the children were saavy political strategists manipulating the system.

The children took advantage of [the upcoming elections] and justified that this law cannot be. They are very well organized, these children, and there are a lot of NGOs that support them. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of an international organization).

These interviewees, ironically, buy into the children's performance of "political" and not "priceless" actors.

The day after the march, Montaña and other senators met with working children and adolescents. For three hours, legislators listened to the children's proposals and explained the government's position. According to newspaper reports, Montaña maintained an ambiguous position towards the law during these discussions. After the meeting, she told the press that she had tried to show the children that some of their concerns were already addressed in the law (Página Siete 2013). Adrian Piejko remembers many of these discussions:

There were some assemblymen that did see children as social actors while others definitely didn't, who said 'They don't know what they want, we do.' There was a senator, I don't remember her name, that was blind and older but she agreed with us, I don't know maybe she had previous experiences. Gabriela Montaña was another person who behaved very well with the kids' proposals. There were some who said 'You're making a grave mistake,

that the Human Rights Commission is going to come and will say that Bolivia is violating all these rights, that they have to sanction us, that soon the European Union will come and sanction us.' But why the European Union? We aren't members of the European Union. But that's where you see that there are still many colonial practices in the name of human rights and that they use that discourse to maintain colonial practices. (Adrian Piejko, Lawyer and adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

But the government position would soon change. Three days later, on December 22, the working children and adolescents finally got what they had wanted, a meeting one-on-one with President Evo Morales himself.

Morales made a public statement.

[He said] that he never told [the police] to do that [throw tear gas], but he also never said who gave the order, they washed their hands. But he called to an urgent breakfast where he invited all the representatives of working children and adolescents. And that is the meeting where [the movement] talked to the president and that was when he gave the order to listen to these children. (Adrian Piejko, Lawyer and adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

The working children mobilized and denounced [the police's behavior] in the media and even international media put their eyes here and so after that the President said, 'Okay, okay, okay. Let's have a meeting, calm down, let's meet, let's listen to your proposals.' I was in that meeting with the president in La Paz. There was about thirty of us, thirty of us went in and the rest stayed outside and were like (Laughs, imitates excited screaming). (Gladys Sarmiento, former UNATSBO leader).

The President and a group from UNATSBO had breakfast at the presidential palace, the "*Palacio Quemado*" ("Burnt Palace"). Pictures of the event show that they all sat around a long rectangular table, with Morales in the middle. Once again, many children wore their signature blue vests. On the table, in front of a smiling Morales, there is a notebook and a copy of *Mi Fortaleza es mi Trabajo* (Pérez and Corz 2013).

The working children who attended say that Morales understood, that he had shared their experiences.

UNATSBO leaders talked and the President said, 'I was also a child and adolescent worker and it is a very rough reality.' He knew that in those times the exploitation of children was immense and that there was no institution to protect them, so we needed to change the code. (Juan David, National representative of UNATSBO).

That was the third time I had seen him. I told the other kids to relax, because sometimes you feel intimidated, no? But he's a person just like anyone else. Yes, he has an important job but that doesn't make him better than anyone else, he's a Bolivian just like us and seeing his story he was a working child too, that generated a certain empathy. And so we met, we gave him our book, our proposal, we [said] we wanted our proposal to be included in the law, and he said that he was going to meet with the senators in charge, the leader is Gabriela Montaña and he was going to talk to them, don't worry. (Gladys Sarmiento, former UNATSBO leader).

After the meeting the president held a press conference. In it, he expressed his support for the working children: "My experience, my position [is]: we should not eliminate the work of girls, boys, and adolescents, but we should also not exploit them or encourage them to work. Some work out of necessity. Eliminating child labor is like eliminating their social conscience" (quoted in Pérez and Corz 2013).

The president stated that he has always held these beliefs. He had been a congressman when the previous law on childhood was being debated. He had argued that many children worked to support their families: "In the rural areas, from the moment you start working, you start providing a service for your family. It isn't exploitation; it's a sacrifice but it's also life itself (...) I told them about that life, but they never understood." He also told journalists about his own early work experiences helping in a bakery, making bricks, and playing the trumpet. He said that the previous Saturday he had sent his sons Evaliz and Álvaro to herd llamas in his hometown Orinoca: "Yesterday (Sunday) one of them complained and said: we're burnt (from the sun), the llama mas '*chícara*' [wild]. I told them: Now you know where your father lived as a boy and adolescent" (quoted in Pérez and Corz 2013). Morales wasn't defending children's economic exploitation but he agreed that work is part of the lived experience of many Bolivian children.

He said that he had worked since he was 6 and that he didn't think it was a bad thing, because it taught him a lot. And that is why he talked to the children. (Adrian Piejko, Lawyer and adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

After the meeting, UNATSBO members commended the President. Coordinator Armando Mamani, for example, expected the President's "unconditional support" (Perez and Corz 2013).

Children's rights NGOs, in contrast, had mixed reactions. All opposed the police's actions but some disagreed with the President's statement that child labor provides children with their "social conscience." But, more importantly, many Senators were listening to Morales. Senator Eugenio Rojas said that the President's opinions would be taken into account (Nuevo Sur 2013).

Over the next few months, UNATSBO representatives held several meetings with government officials.

[After the meeting with the President] the dialogue [with members of the government] lasted about four or five months in meetings, exhausting meetings of 8 to 10 hours, but [the working children] had energy because they were asking for their rights. (Adrian Piejko, Lawyer and adult collaborator of UNATSBO).

UNATSBO describes a grueling process. International organizations describe a rushed job.

What happened at the time was that there was a group that was looking into the revision of the law, in this group was the ombudsman and UNICEF was present as well, with the Ministry of Labor. And during one day, from what I'm told, they changed the working age *three times*. In one day! It was a mess. And the initial response was to respect the fourteen years of age. And then they had a demonstration from UNATSBO, [...] they protested and said that they have right to work and whatever. And from what I understand, from what I hear, there came a direct instruction from Evo that they should lower the age. It comes from the president. And because his word is very close to law, they changed it down to ten years of age. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of an international organization).

On July 17, 2014 the Law No. 548, was presented and approved. In it, the Bolivian government did *not* eliminate the minimum age standard as UNATSBO requested. But it did create exceptions to the minimum age. Article 129 states that children are allowed to work if they have their parent's and a government agency's written permission. They can work independently after they turn 10 and for a third party after they turn 12, as long as the activity "does not impair their right to education, is not dangerous [or] unhealthy, does not offend their dignity and integral development, or is not expressly prohibited by the law." Article 127 specifies that activities in the family or community setting are not work because they have "a formative nature and perform a socialization and learning function." The code no longer promises to eradicate child labor in the next 5 years, but rather to "eradicate the *causes* of child labor" (emphasis added).

The promulgation

The law was presented in a ceremony presided by Vice-President Álvaro García Linera. Evo Morales was in Brazil at the time and wasn't able to attend. Pictures show the Vice-President holding the new law with a young girl or hugging her. They are flanked by an adolescent and a man in military uniform. The whipala flag stands in a corner, the flag of the Andean Indigenous community, the co-official flag of Bolivia (Página Siete 2014).

But while the images show government officials and UNATSBO representatives in agreement, their speeches at the promulgation ceremony underscored their differences. The adolescent, Eddy Dávalos was the UNATSBO representative who spoke during the promulgation ceremony. In his speech, he criticized the ILO for “imposing on Latin American nations the minimum age for child labor [...] without taking into account the reality of each country.” He accused the ILO of hiding working children, whereas the new law 548 recognizes and deals with their presence. He said: “They throw us the law and tell us to comply, but look at this reality, children under ten are here. The ILO doesn't think” (Opinión 2014). His stance, UNATSBO's stance, was clear: oppose international organizations and conventions, especially C138, accept and work with the local reality, recognize and respect working children.

Government officials, in contrast, told a different story. Eugenio Rojas, now President of the Senate, also spoke but, unlike Dávalos, he did not talk of reality or recognition but about the government's goal of eliminating the *causes* of child labor. He said: “The objective is that by the close of 2019, there will be no children living on the streets, there will be no children living in jail with their parents, and there will be no children that work [...]. These are concrete plans to attack, to eradicate the work of boys and girls” (Página Siete 2014). So there was a rift between what the government said and what UNATSBO wanted. UNATSBO rejected the ILO's goals. The government accepted the goals and rejected the means. The government *wanted* to eradicate child labor but to do so through an alternative approach.

The Vice-President walked the middle ground. García Linera talked about the new minimum age as a balance between international conventions and the Bolivian reality:

We just promulgated a law that has been difficult to write because there was a set of international conventions that the State had signed referring to the rights of children and adolescents. And there is a Bolivian reality, an inherited way of working, a unique way of [understanding] work and the situation of children and adolescents in the country. [...] The President (Evo Morales) also intervened in order to find this just equilibrium between reality, rights, and international treaties (La Estrella del Oriente 2014).

But even García Linera's more temperate approach was not what UNATSBO had bargained for. Some working children felt betrayed.

So paf, they approved the code and everyone was happy. But then something we also saw when we studied the code is that it was all a ruse ("*tomada de pelo*"). Because it's all right in the part about the minimum age for employment, we managed to reduce it to 12 for dependent work and to 10 for independent work, but what about the transitory (dispositions) in the back? I don't remember the exact words, but in one part it says that they *will* try to eradicate child labor... and we said, 'But here you say one thing and there you say another!' They mocked the movement, they made fun of us. And then there's one part that is poorly written, in the part on the minimum age in that it doesn't specify what independent work means and that good work conditions need to be kept. So when you read it and you interpret it like many specialists have interpreted it, they say 'This is an abomination, how can this be? It's terrible, unheard of, that they reduce the age, how can they do that? It's a sin!' (Gladys Sarmiento, former UNATSBO leader).

Members of international organizations were also irate.

It was all cut-up, it was done so that everyone has rights except those under the age of ten! If you read the article closely, the chapter was created for children older than fourteen who can work, in some cases even after age 12. And they will have a series of guarantees, of protections, when you read the law. But the children who work from age ten are the ones who work independently, they wash cars, they sell flowers, there is no link to family work or to any kind of protection. So what is scandalous is not the reduction to age ten but that there are no types of defenses [for younger children]. Because they put it in wrong, they rushed it (Maria Gracia Morais, Legal expert and adviser to UNICEF).

Both the ILO and UNICEF released press statements noting their "concern" (Correo del Sur 2014; La Estrella del Oriente 2014). Other human rights organizations, political commentators, and journalists around the world also reacted. Many called the law "regressive," "misguided," "a

Dickensian leap backward” that “shames us all” (Becker 2014; Krishnan 2014; McQuade 2014; Otis 2014). A few local actors criticized the new law, but only a few.

The one person who spoke out against the law was the Ombudsman. But he was more concerned not so much about child labor, that was also part of it, but he was more concerned by another part of the law where the penal age was moved from 16 to 14 or 15 to 14 or something like that. [...] There’s not been a lot of fuss about that. The ombudsman was the only one. When there was the Universal Periodic Review with the 19 recommendations, that was mentioned in 2, 3 articles in the main press, and that was it. In the Bolivian media you won’t find a lot. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of an international organization).

The Ombudsman, the Bolivian Permanent Assembly of Human Rights and La Paz’s Child Advocacy Agency all termed the law a “step back” (El Diario 2014).

Still, almost all actors involved can agree on one thing: that the law changed because of the working children’s march.

I think that it was the spark, to some extent, that media [attention] [...] Children marching and facing the police because they wouldn’t let them into plaza Murillo, that was a good grievance, that was the spark. After that they met with the President, sign some compromises and etc., we come here. (Sandro Delgado, National head of conflicts, Ombudsman’s office).

It was at least an event that in some ways made the State react and ask why we are making a law for children without considering their opinions. In that time the working children organized and there were repercussions through the media. I understand that thanks to this they met with the president and with the president of the senate at that time, Dr. Gabriela Montaña. So that’s when we realized that the norm couldn’t be constructed only by adults but we had to make room for children (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of government).

The law changed because one set of translators – UNATSBO – was able to perform simultaneously a local, political persona and a global, moral script of the priceless and innocence of children.

The Bolivian government: From audience to actor

Members of the Bolivian government were the audience of different translations of global norms against child labor. UNATSBO made a compelling case for their translation when they marched towards the Presidential Palace and faced police repression. The government has since

adopted a version of their translation and turned it into law. The government now has to defend this choice to both local and international audiences of their own.

But as the government turns into an actor within child labor debates, it also interprets and rewrites UNATSBO's translation, creating a new translation of its own. So while UNATSBO wants to reconsider the value of child work and recognize working children as a respected social category, some members of government, as evidenced in the law's promulgation ceremony, have taken a different approach. Some members of government today talk about different means for the same end, talk about eradicating the causes of child labor, not child labor itself. Others, however, do align themselves with UNATSBO and want to revindicate child labor.

For this dissertation, I spoke to members of the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Labor, the Vice-Presidency's office, the Ombudsman's office, and the La Paz Municipal support center for working children and adolescents. Interviewee's roles in government, therefore, ranged from providing direct support to working children to overseeing compliance with the law to establishing new projects and public policies. And while they all defend the new childhood law and express their support for Evo Morales' new position, they also differ in what they think the new law actually means. For some, it is the government's way of redefining the morality of child labor. For others, it is the government trying to fight child labor through different methods. The Bolivian government, therefore, is split on this issue and is aware of this split.

On the one hand, there are members of government – especially in the Ministry of Justice and those providing direct services – who want to keep working children safe and want the state to recognize the potential value of child work. They speak of regulating rather than prohibiting child labor:

There are protective dispositions so that those under the age of fourteen who work should only work 8 hours a day and should receive the same salary as an adult who does the same activity. So those from 12 to 14 who work for a third party can work up to 6 hours, have two hours for their education within the work day, with a maximum of 30 hours worked a week and others with a maximum of 40 hours a week. They also have a right to insurance and all the protective dispositions involved in working for a third person. Those who work

independently, what we've set is that parents have to notice that they go to school, have access to health, help orient them in putting their money in social security, not work after ten pm. The communal activities that have to do with family activities have their limits too, so that they aren't confused with labor exploitation. (Ana Bazán, Responsible for the transversalization of the rights of children in the Ministry of Justice).

They speak of the importance of children's participation:

The law we have right now opens the possibility for a committee of children and adolescents at each level, at the municipal level, without depending on the municipal government, but they [the municipalities] need to give them economic support and technical advice. So these committees must be conformed from existing organizations, so we have been promoting that municipal governments fulfill their role. So the working children are organized on their own but they can participate in these spaces. (Ana Bazán, Responsible for the transversalization of the rights of children in the Ministry of Justice).

In other countries, children and adolescents participate, are part of the state's construction of plans, programs, and projects, but only at the consultancy level, they are only consulted. However, here we want them to participate, to ask them what they want. [...] We have a plan from 2016 to 2020 where there's an outline, where we share this document with children and adolescents and with local and municipal authorities. (Raúl Escalante, General director of Childhood and Older Adults in the Ministry of Justice).

They speak of being creative with participation, of finding innovative ways to help children express their "true voice."

When I was representative of the Ombudsman's office, we implemented a strategy that allowed children to be heard, to be heard with their own voice. We worked this project with UNICEF, 'Listen to my voice,' so we went through neighborhood, plazas, fairs, schools, so that through games we could identify which children were victims of some kind of physical, psychological, or sexual aggression. [We used] a series of forms that didn't harm children directly, only through games, painting, drawings. I remember well the case of a girl who drew the plaza where our team was, an interactive plaza, and she drew a devil with horns and everything. And when we asked her who it was she said it was her dad, who hurt her. She drew all the tools he used to hurt her. So what did we do? With that document we went to the child and adolescence advocacy office to identify what was happening to the girl and to verify the integrality of the family. (Teófila Guarachi, Former representative from the Ombudsman's office of La Paz).

They do note that children's participation can be problematic. These interviewees recognize that children could potentially be manipulated. One government official, for instance, recalls a recent child congress in the city of Sucre.

There was a lot of participation from children and adolescents, committees came from every department. [But] they weren't very critical, only four working children participated, an adolescent participated, [and said] that they were getting lost and not going back to school and other things also that had been transmitted to them. (Ana Bazán, Responsible for the transversalization of the rights of children in the Ministry of Justice).

Still, overall these interviewees value child participation as a fundamental right. They tend to believe that others disagree with them because others hold a paternalistic rather than rights-driven view of childhood:

It has to do with the adult, obviously, because if you or I are with [the children], we are going to have the capacity to listen, we know that we don't have to impose our opinion, that they have a right to their own opinion. Because the other, the adult-centric view has to do with those views we had in the past, the 'doctrine of the irregular situation' that said that the child was incapable, that the child is also poor and dangerous, that excluded children... (Ana Bazán, Responsible for the transversalization of the rights of children in the Ministry of Justice).

The law, in this view, is good because it brings working children into the light, offering them new and greater protections than an alternative approach.

I think that some people have questioned us, saying we are promoting it so there will be *more* working children, but I think that what we are doing is protecting them. It's not that today there are more working children, but that today we see them more. (Ana Bazán, Responsible for the transversalization of the rights of children in the Ministry of Justice).

On the other hand, other members of government – especially in the Ministry of Labor and the Ombudsman's office – want to keep children safe but also want to attack the causes of child labor, making them less likely to work. They talk about the “eradication of the determinants of child labor.”

We see the 'eradication of determinants' so that in the future that will eradicate child labor. If I end the cause I will end the practice as well. [...] The code sends you to eradicate the determinant, not eradicate child labor, eradicate the determinant, the cause. (Yuri Callisaya, Director of the Plan to Eliminate the Determinants of Child Labor in the Bolivian Ministry of Labor).

They talk about creating public policies that make child work unnecessary:

We have a list of 64 detrmnants, [because] all children work because they are poor. [...] The Ministry of Labor is going to put out a project called 'Employment for my Parents.' If

dad and mom have a job with an income they have to be committed to their children. We have a list of children who are working because their parents don't have enough income, so through this public service [the parents] can now access good jobs where the Ministry pays the salary for the first three months and after that the employer will take over, on the condition that the children go back to school and don't work. For the moment the project will be launched in La Paz but I'm sure it will be a success and we can do it at a national level. [...] (Yuri Callisaya, Director of the Plan to Eliminate the Determinants of Child Labor in the Bolivian Ministry of Labor).

First we have to see the causes that make a child work, and it has to do with the adults. So how do you strengthen the surroundings so that the child doesn't work? The causes are structural, the issue of violence, poverty, they are issues you need to attend to to minimize child labor. (Nancy Alé, Head of the human rights unit for children and adolescents in the Ombudsman's office).

These interviewees also talk about participation but they believe children should participate as "children" not as "working children," that the children should not define themselves in relation to their labor.

I think that [the working children's movement] is interesting but it has a bias that is linked because these are working children. But [participation] must be fomented from the government, the government should promote an organization of children, children in school, not necessarily children with problems, all children are vulnerable so it's not necessarily social problems, middle class children who are organized... In schools there are these mechanisms, programs to promote an effective participation, looking for leaders. (Sandro Delgado, National head of conflicts, Ombudsman's office).

These interviews openly worry about the lower minimum age. It is a gamble that might work but might also put children in greater danger. Their view of children is closer to that of international organizations than to UNATSBO: Children are fundamentally vulnerable.

I think 14 is a good age because for some things the matter of age is so different. 14 has been generalized in terms of work, in terms of penal responsibility, [although] evidently you don't exercise your full citizenship until you are 18. So there are several ages, but I think that 14 is a good age to protect an adolescent worker. I have my fears about this exceptionality from age 10 because we haven't seen how the system of protection would work for that age group. (Nancy Alé, Head of the human rights unit for children and adolescents in the Ombudsman's office).

Not everyone falls on one side or another. Some members of government occupy both positions, defending child participation but worrying over the costs of child labor.

I have a lot of mixed feelings towards this posture. Why? Because on the one hand I see the reality and I say that they really need to work, you can't tell them not to work. But they also need to be children and there is so much abuse, so I think that we can say you can work from age ten and that's it. [...] In informal commerce you start as a kid and you go with your mother from age 5, 6. You go to school and then to the market, to the stand to sell, and then by 8 or 10 your mother gets a stand for you. You don't finish your education, you go back to the market, and the cycle of informal work repeats itself. [...] But there is an even worse... there's a delicate gap between child labor and the crime of trafficking people. The promoters of this crime in many cases are employment agencies. (Teófila Guarachi, Former representative from the Ombudsman's office of La Paz).

But, in short, the Bolivian government is in an uncomfortable position. The government has defied international treaties to side with the working children's movement and yet abides by the international goal of eliminating child labor in the long run, alienating UNATSBO and their allies.

These internal differences have made the implementation of the law difficult. According to two interviewees, no one in government is willing to take responsibility for the new position.

Who do I blame, the watchman? The secretary? Here no one has accepted [responsibility] for lowering the minimum age, no one says 'we decided.' This is the official opinion now, that children have to be protected because it is a reality that they are working and the only way to protect them is allowing them to start working. (Rodolfo Eróstegui, Former Minister of Labor).

We made an investigation on what law 548 has accomplished around child labor and no one could give us an answer. (Teófila Guarachi, Former representative from the Ombudsman's office of La Paz).

The law had established a deadline of three months for the different ministries to create the new authorization forms that would grant children under 14 the permission to work. But the forms were only completed in 2016, two years later, after extensive disagreements. And members of government also disagree on what these forms are for. The authorization forms give working children visibility and making sure they are protected.

You need an authorization for both exceptions. In the cases where there is an employer you need an authorization for children from 12 to 14. They can be allowed to work as long as the employer complies with protection requirements like an occupational exam to see what is the condition the adolescent is in, like his physical and emotional capacity to work in the position, to see that it doesn't interrupt their educational process, that it doesn't denigrate their integrity or dignity. [...] For children working independently the child and adolescence

advocacy office (“*defensoría de la niñez y adolescencia*”) gives the authorization. The Ministry has put out a protocol, a form, so if they answer NO to the question, are you in school? automatically they don’t get the authorization. [...] Once the child or adolescent [presents the form] the advocacy office studies the case for 72 hours, where they determine whether the child really needs this authorization. What does it depend on? When the child demonstrates that he is an orphan or that the health of the father or mother is delicate, when the advocacy office makes a study and determines that without the economic support generated by the adolescent the family subsistence would really be very difficult, if not impossible. But it doesn’t mean, in any case, that the office will give the authorization if the adolescent isn’t in school, in no case will they give the authorization if the form of work is dangerous, if it is after 10 pm... [...] So when we get a form that says Juan Perez is 13 and is working in a shoe factory from 10 am to 4 pm and earns 1805 bolivianos, goes to school, it tells you everything you need to know then we say ok, so that [work] inspector will go and verify that the adolescent is working like this. (Yuri Callisaya, Director of the Plan to Eliminate the Determinants of Child Labor in the Bolivian Ministry of Labor).

But for some interviewees, they are also a form of “red tape,” meant to make it more complicated for children to work.

When we talk about working for a third party that means working 30 hours a week, meaning 6 hours a day, but the salary has to be the minimum salary of 1,805 bolivianos (\$262.20 US Dollars) for 40 hours, so an employer will probably not prefer that. [...] When an employer will hire an adolescent he knows that he is paying more [for less hours of work.] [...] This registry doesn’t have to be a ticket you simply fill and we give out thousands and thousands of authorizations. When we were discussing the law we actually saw this form as a barrier for protection. What happens, for instance, when an advocacy office identifies a case and cannot give the authorization? Because father consumes drugs, mother is sick, he doesn’t go to school, we can’t give the authorization. But we don’t just say no and that’s it. That’s when the Ministry of Justice has to come in. (Yuri Callisaya, Director of the Plan to Eliminate the Determinants of Child Labor in the Bolivian Ministry of Labor).

One way or another, these mechanisms aren’t working. As of 2016, none of the law’s provisions had been set in motion. Even within state institutions, different actors like the police have yet to abide by the law’s innovations.

The right that has been given is that now they can place a complaint. [Children], according to the constitution and according to the convention, have the right to place a complaint without being accompanied by a representative, meaning an older person who in many cases can be the aggressor. [...] But what happens is that when a boy or girl goes to the police they are discredited, they don’t believe them, they ask them to come with an older person and don’t provide immediate help. They are violating the norm but above all their

right to make a complaint as dictated by the convention, the constitution, and law 548. (Teófila Guarachi, Former representative from the Ombudsman's office of La Paz).

In Bolivia they are very flimsy, the child advocacy offices are very flimsy. Institutionally, they are weak, they don't respond. Economically, they aren't strong, they don't have the human resources, they aren't prepared and therefore their responses are medium or almost null. [...] [What is missing is] first political will, because if there is political will then there are resources. That's why I say that children are still objects of discourse, not objects of protection. (Sandro Delgado, National head of conflicts, Ombudsman's office).

We need more funds for the issue of childhood and adolescence, the ministry has too few funds for the magnitude of our responsibility. [...] We are 71 [work inspectors]. And specialized [on child labor] there are 12 more. 71 plus 12, 83. (Yuri Callisaya, Director of the Plan to Eliminate the Determinants of Child Labor in the Bolivian Ministry of Labor).

Still, the government has to present a consistent and unified front to international audiences, it has to make a performance of its own. In 2015, Ministry of Labor representatives traveled to Geneva to defend the new law on childhood.

I was part of a group that was part of the defense and we did a forty-five page text where we started from the economic conditions of our country, especially in relation to children and adolescents, cultural, educational, health issues, to then go into the issue of work protection. But obviously our minister had only 15 minutes to make a speech in which he couldn't cover everything we would have wanted. In the first stage he made more of a political defense. [...] He talked more about state politics. (Yuri Callisaya, Director of the Plan to Eliminate the Determinants of Child Labor in the Bolivian Ministry of Labor).

The government, in other words, is defending its position, especially it's right to decide its own positions. And despite the different interpretations of the law, all government interviewees agree that the law is *good*, that the government is upholding its constitution, the rights of children, and its moral responsibilities.

The spirit of the code is lovely, not only on issues of work but in general, the code has a very pretty soul. (*IJ: In what way?*) In that we have moved forward on the issue of work, especially, so that all children have rights. It sets the issue that [children] need to be promoted but also welcomed, they must be accompanied and strengthened from all areas. Our state politics have recovered the concept of protection, but the mechanisms are missing to give flesh to this spirit. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of government).

I'm not saying it's a perfect law, but I think it is close to 100%. A lot will depend on the authorities to continue executing their functions and how they work in the future, always

with this vision of achieving the norm for the benefit of children and adolescents. (Raúl Escalante, General director of Childhood and Older Adults in the Ministry of Justice).

I'm hopeful that we will be able to reduce child exploitation in an important way. I'm hopeful that family activities will be recognized as a responsibility that benefits children but being careful that this doesn't become a way to make issues like child exploitation invisible. (Yuri Callisaya, Director of the Plan to Eliminate the Determinants of Child Labor in the Bolivian Ministry of Labor).

The government officials are surprised that there have been almost no international consequences for Bolivia's new law. Yuri Callisaya remembers the Geneva conference:

We were in the eye of the storm. All the media was there. Japan, for instance, was one of the countries that supported us. But at that moment we weren't authorized to make any statements to the media because of the delicate nature of the issue. A working girl even went, she didn't speak but she went. We were worried she would ask something in the plenary session or bring out some sign. The country didn't present a single voice. The Bolivian Central Workers Union ("*Central Obrera Boliviana*") which represents the workers and the Private Confederation of Employing Companies of Bolivia ("*Confederación Privada de Empresas de Empleadores de Bolivia*") were also there and were very harsh against the code, of our own country! (Yuri Callisaya, Director of the Plan to Eliminate the Determinants of Child Labor in the Bolivian Ministry of Labor).

But the outcome was in fact mild.

The language was diplomatic, they use other codes. It's so diplomatic you come out happy. The ILO said, for example, 'We recommend...' And so you say 'Ah! But it's just a recommendation!' (Laughs). (Yuri Callisaya, Director of the Plan to Eliminate the Determinants of Child Labor in the Bolivian Ministry of Labor).

Some interviewees express relief, they had been worried that the international community would react negatively.

We were worried about international repercussions, of how the ILO and its allies might see us. But for us it's better to protect than to invisibilize, it's better to say let them work safely than unsafely, so in the end we made an analysis, we talk about exceptionality, an exception only when there are no other alternatives. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of government).

Others are more defiant. Bolivia is a sovereign nation and can decide on its own fate.

IJ: Have there been any consequences?

Ana Bazán: Not so far.

IJ: Have you had to defend this position?

Bazán: Last year in June. The Minister of Labor had to go to an ILO conference where they recommended that we changed the law.

IJ: And your position?

Bazán: Is no.

Some government officials distrust international organizations and NGOs more generally. For instance, Callisaya claims that NGOs have made a business out of Bolivian poverty:

Bolivia is a country with a lot of NGOs, personally I think that because of Bolivia's poverty it has been an excellent business for many of these organizations. For instance, in Bolivia there is a region in the north of Potosí where there has been so much financing from NGOs, something like the same [amount of investment] than Africa, because the north of Potosí has been categorized as one of the poorest places in the world. But if we see the reality in the last thirty years, the efforts in this region have only been focused on "assistance," when people come to an organization from Spain, Belgium, the United States [the people there] don't think how can we work but what will they give me. [...] I don't want to sound arrogant but I think that we wouldn't be wrong to say that poverty is the best business in some parts. They came to the north of Potosí [...] and what has changed? With all that money that has come in? [...] Let's make an audit study to see what percentage of that money goes to administrative expenses and salaries and what percentage really goes to the population. (Yuri Callisaya, Director of the Plan to Eliminate the Determinants of Child Labor in the Bolivian Ministry of Labor).

To curb NGOs, Callisaya talks about the importance of greater government oversight.

NGOs have an important role in the country, but if they are going to put in money in the country they also need to have responsibilities. That's the part that a lot of NGOs don't like, they don't want to be controlled by the state and now there's a big discussion about that. A lot of [international] cooperation is going to leave, but we shouldn't be afraid of that. Before it was, 'oh no, the Danes are leaving, what are we going to do? If USAID leaves, what do we do?' Well, USAID left and we're still here. (Yuri Callisaya, Director of the Plan to Eliminate the Determinants of Child Labor in the Bolivian Ministry of Labor).

For these interviewees the state is sovereign and should not be pressured by outsider organizations.

There have also been no local consequences for the new law either. A former ombudsman for La Paz wanted to take the government to court, claiming that the new law was unconstitutional. This, however, did not occur and the ombudsman has since left office. UNATSBO may be unsatisfied but the government has paid little attention. The government may have sided with UNATSBO after the march, but interviewees do not claim to be allies of this organization. On the

contrary, most government interviewees have a mixed view of UNATSBO. Those who want to eradicate the causes of child labor fundamentally disagree with the movement, they believe that UNATSBO child leaders have valid opinions, but worry that they are vulnerable to being manipulated.

The positives [of the movement] is that they help you develop as a person, as a collective. [...] they give you a guide, a line of action, they tell you these are the bases, let's see how we work, how we organize, what are the mechanisms, the dynamics, etc. Professional people dedicated to this [help], absolutely respecting what [the children] say, their times, their spaces, their forms, that's the positive. But the negative is that some processes can be manipulative in order to get more economic resources or to [keep the children] stuck, not let them grow as people, as collectivities. (Sandro Delgado, National head of conflicts, Ombudsman's office).

When you talk to the current leader you will see that – I know her since she was young because I worked with her – but she has a very institutionalized discourse. That's not wrong, I too have an institutionalized discourse from the state, but she contradicts herself and that's where we clash. [...] Look, I worked in [one of the NGOs that support working children]. And what did I do as a psychologist there? I would meet the children and ask, 'What do you do?' 'I shine shoes.' 'Okay, so here is your box, your [shoe-shining] cream, your brushes, all new, now go.' [...] So there are some NGOs, foundations, that strengthen the child and adolescent unions. It's good that these kids be protected but for instance I do not share the idea that they should march on May first [Labor Day] demanding the right to work. (Yuri Callisaya, Director of the Plan to Eliminate the Determinants of Child Labor in the Bolivian Ministry of Labor).

Others believe that when UNATSBO leaders focus on the “right to work” they overlook the real possibility of exploitation:

They talk about not victimizing working children, saying that the pressure to work is much more than [what we see], that there shouldn't be a minimum age, that is the discourse, that everyone should work in an environment of protection, dignified work. They recognize the worst forms of work and are conscious that those cannot be promoted, but for them it is hard to identify where work is and where exploitation is, because the discourse is one of freedom to have child work. (Nancy Alé, Head of the human rights unit for children and adolescents in the Ombudsman's office).

In short, these interviewees recognize that UNATSBO was instrumental in changing the law but don't believe that the organization is necessarily “right” in its view of child labor.

To summarize, the Bolivian government is caught between multiple actors pulling for its attention. It tries to contend with international conventions, local conditions, local translators like international organizations and UNATSBO. The result is a divided audience that must somehow act as a unified actor, defending the law to skeptics and putting it in motion. Many interviewees underscore the difficulty of their position, how other “translators” might make general arguments but they have to find a way to make their arguments work. As one interviewee said:

It's very easy to say that children cannot work starting at a certain age, [but] we cannot put on a blindfold and say that this is not the reality. We would be committing a grave mistake internally and internationally. I believe that the correct thing would be for the state to assume a greater responsibility, meaning that it assumes a reality that is lived in our country where children unfortunately work under the age of twelve in response to a family need. [...] So when the state becomes responsible and takes the first steps to identify the problem... because until a little while ago we refused to identify the problem. (Asked to remain anonymous, Member of government).

The Bolivian government has now identified the problem. It has yet to create a sustainable solution. But by siding with UNATSBO, by reacting to their performance, the government has changed the legitimacy of certain cultural representations. Now more than one story about child labor circulates in Bolivia. Now an unexpected story has received the government's stamp of approval. In the next chapter I explore what this means for working children themselves, how they contend with the changing landscape of meanings.

Chapter six: The priceless child talks back

At the start of the dissertation I asked how global norms shape the local laws and practices of child labor. The preceding chapters have discussed global norms and laws – how people write norms into conventions, how people spread conventions in bundles, how translators unpack and repurpose these bundles, how translators perform and defend their interpretations, how the government then turns different interpretations into law, and how different representations of childhood and child labor coexist and circulate in the local public sphere. This is a story of people interpreting, transforming, and rewriting meanings. Some things are lost and some things are added in the process of translation.

In this chapter, I finally turn to the practice of child labor – to how working children themselves navigate the many representations and meanings in their midst. I ask: How do working children understand and talk about child labor? How do they reconcile their messy lived experiences to the idealized visions of childhood set up by adults? While research on child labor looks at the causes and consequences of this practice (see Webbink, Smits, and de Jong 2015) and, more recently, at the experiences and opinions of working children (Abebe and Kjørholt 2009; Aitken et al. 2006; Bourdillon 2007; Bromley and Mackie 2009; Da Silva Telles and Abramo 1987; Domic Ruiz 1999; Ivernizzi 2003; Ramírez Sánchez 2007; Liebel 2004; Omokhodion et al. 2006; White 2002; Wihstutz 2007), it has yet to explore how working children interpret and give their work moral meaning. This chapter looks at how “priceless children” talk back to these representations.

Individuals, organizations, and institutions often struggle to become legitimate market actors, especially when they work with something society considers sacred like life, death, love, sex, body parts, nature, land, or children. Following the pioneering work of Viviana Zelizer (1978; 1985), many scholars have focused on how key actors fight for legitimacy by proposing alternative moral discourses: if the public believes that buying a stranger’s life insurance is immoral because

it debases the value of life, interested actors counter with stories of how this practice is moral because the buyer will alleviate the stranger's family's financial burden (Quinn 2008). If one group of actors believes buying blood and organs is moral because it makes the process more efficient and maximizes collective welfare, moral entrepreneurs must counter with stories about how this practice corrupts people's motives and leads people to see each other only as means and ends (Healy 2006; see also Chan 2009; Dromi 2013; Fourcade 2011; Trompette 2013). I call this practice "moral breaking": actors reject or "break from" one moral narrative to replace it with another.

But morally illegitimate actors cannot always change the hegemonic narrative, and nonetheless continue to "survive and thrive" (Hudson and Okhuysen 2009: 134; see also Anteby 2010). People and organizations may oppose the commercialization of blood or organs but a global black market has nonetheless developed (Scheper-Hughes 1999). Communities may oppose casual homosexual sex but men's bathhouses still operate (Hudson and Okhuysen 2009). And countries around the world may pass laws against child labor but 168 million children are still involved in this practice (ILO 2013). Therefore, we need to look at the everyday lives and moral strategies of these illegitimate actors who have not been able or willing to "break from" the official moral story.

In this chapter, I propose that "moral breaking" is only one way actors – in this case, children – try to gain moral legitimacy. Another option is "moral bending," or qualifying and adapting existing moral discourses. Classical studies of deviance tell us that people ignoring a moral injunction don't always reject and comprehensively replace the dominant moral logic. People can also qualify this logic, redirecting blame, hiding their behavior, making justifications and excuses (Cressey 1953; Goffman 1963; Scott and Lyman 1968; Sykes and Matza 1957; see also Maruna and Copes 2005). Moral logics, these studies remind us, are flexible: rules always have conditions, exceptions, vindications, and loopholes (Sykes and Matza 1957: 666). Actors can take a hegemonic moral story and change events in the plot or details of the characters or features of the setting. They find ways to reconcile their "deviant" actions with existing narratives, to make their actions morally acceptable, at least for themselves.

As mentioned in the methods chapter, from June to December 2016 I interviewed 64 working children who belong to local unions in Bolivia and Ecuador, “rank and file” members as opposed to the union leaders. I compare children in these two countries to see whether the stories they tell differ based on the legal legitimacy of their practices, given that in Bolivia children are allowed, under certain circumstances, to work starting at age 10, while in the relatively similar Ecuador children can only work after turning 14. All the children chose their own pseudonyms, generally choosing the names of their friends, of pop and reggaeton singers, famous soccer players, and fictional characters from Western fairy tales or from the Japanese animated series Dragon Ball Z (See tables 2 and 3 in Appendix).

In what follows I show that, in general, children in both countries tell similar tales: they all work out of economic necessity, but many also value work as a source of dignity. Many see the “global fight against child labor” as an attack on their moral worth. However, unlike the union leaders, the rank and file children do not completely reject the global narrative of the “priceless child,” the view that children’s economic activities pollute their sacred innocence, the idea that children’s value is emotional, not economic (Zelizer 1985). Rather, the children I interviewed *bend* the global narrative. They argue that their work is sacralizing rather than polluting and that their emotional value comes from their work. To do so, working children tell three type of stories: (1) stories about work as a moral education; (2) stories about work as a moral performance; and (3) stories about work as an act of love.

Findings

Working children in Bolivia and Ecuador: An overview

Most of the children I spoke with began working at age 8. They usually started alongside a parent or an older sibling who taught them how to work. About half still work with someone else – a friend or a relative – the rest began working alone at age 10 or 12. In Ecuador, the interviewees are almost exclusively street vendors and domestic workers, while in Bolivia they are workshop

helpers, shop assistants, retail workers, market traders, or they carry produce in outdoor markets. Two adolescents, an Ecuadorian girl and a Bolivian boy, work in a dance-troupe. A 13-year-old Bolivian boy is a part-time clown. A 15-year-old Bolivian girl used to clean gravestones for money. Several of the children are under their country's minimum age for employment or work for a third party without a formal contract.

Most children say they started working because of economic necessities. "Family economy," says Fernando (12), "there's always something missing, let's say milk, so we have to help." A few say it was because their parents separated or a parent was injured. "My father cleans windows," says Kevin (16), "but he fell off a scaffold and it was on the third floor and he needed an operation and couldn't work for months." Almost all of the interviewees say that they chose to work, sometimes with encouragement from a parent or an older sibling. A few even mention that they had to convince their parents to allow them to work. Violeta (18) tells me:

I started thinking things over so I told my dad, daddy I want to work. I want to earn a living somehow, because I want to help you at home. I don't want to see you suffer anymore. And my dad told me, you've never made me suffer, I have to give you everything. But I told him no, I don't want to see you suffer anymore, it's better if I start working. And my dad said okay, if you want to work that's okay. I made up my mind.

The only interviewees who originally did not want to work were adolescent girls who do domestic work for a third party. They are the only ones who claim not to like their work and the only ones who say that they have had to interrupt their studies. All of the other working children I interviewed say that they combine work and school. Work, they claim, has never interfered with their studies, they find time to work either before or after school hours or on weekends. Table 1 summarizes the work experiences of the interviewees.

Table 7. Working children participants' work experiences

Work	By country	By age	By gender
Work week hours.....	Children in Bolivia work 1 to 5 hours a week, 3 to 5 days a week. Children in Ecuador tend to work 1 hour less.	Young children (7 to 13) tend to work 1 to 2 hours less than adolescents (14 to 18).	Girls tend to work more than boys during the week, especially girls who do domestic work for a third party.
Weekend hours.....	Children in Bolivia work 5 to 12 hours a day. Children in Ecuador tend to work 2 to 3 hours less.	Adolescents often only work during the weekend.	Boys tend to work more than girls during the weekend.
Domestic work.....	Only 2 children in Bolivia and 1 child in Ecuador count domestic work as part of their employment. When asked, all children say that they do household chores.	Only young children count domestic work as part of their employment.	Only girls count domestic work as part of their employment.
Earnings.....	Children in Bolivia usually earn between \$2 to \$10 USD a day, which is less than the minimum wage (\$10 a day). Children in Ecuador tend to earn \$5 to \$30 USD a day, which can be more than the minimum wage (\$17 dollars a day). ¹⁸	Younger children tend to earn less than adolescents.	Girls tend to earn slightly less than boys.
Use of earnings.....	Half of the children in Ecuador give all their earnings to their mothers. Most children in Bolivia and half of the children in Ecuador keep part of their earnings.	Younger children usually give their earnings to their mothers. Adolescents usually keep at least half for themselves.	Girls and boys give their mothers or keep their earnings in equal proportion.

Although all the children I interviewed were recruited by local working children's movements, most have only participated in these movements sporadically: C.J. (12) says "I haven't been able to come. I've been working and [the adult collaborator] changed the meeting time." "We have a class once a week" says Elsa (7). Jesus (17) adds: "I marched once, when I was little, 10, 11 years old. I just took a poster and don't remember the rest (laughs)."

This doesn't necessarily mean that children aren't more involved in the movement. It could be that their participation is a normal part of their routine, so when I ask about the movement they try to think about extraordinary events. For instance, in Cochabamba I was invited to watch the

¹⁸ Some children in Bolivia work with their parents or a close relative. In those cases, they are not paid.

local organization's weekly meetings. When I later interviewed some of the members, they did not mention the meeting as part of their movement activities.

Still, a few children don't know what I'm talking about when I mention the movement or the acronym "NATs" ("*niños, niñas y adolescentes trabajadores*"), which the unions often use. Most of the children are not familiar with the child labor laws of their country or with the ILO or UNICEF. "Is UNICEF the organization that helps women?" asks Andrea Lynette (10). Z (13) says: "I have heard of the ILO, but I'm not sure what they do." Only the interviewees in Potosí said that the ILO was an organization that wanted to eradicate child labor.

Still, working children know that child labor is illegal and that international actors, broadly speaking, oppose children's work. For them, however, work is a positive part of their lives. Work is normal: their siblings work, their friends work, their parents often worked when they were young. A few children ask me whether I had worked as a child and are surprised that I hadn't. Some claim that their country's president worked as well. In the Bolivian case this is true: Evo Morales has worked since he was 4, herding llamas, selling ice cream, and planting coca leaves (Yu 2016: 49). In the Ecuadorian case this is not true¹⁹: Rafael Correa's first job was as a religious educator after he turned 16 (Rivera Yanez, n.d.). Some Ecuadorian children think he worked anyways. Sara (11) asks "Why doesn't he let us work if he had to go through it too?"

Work, in other words, is a "good" practice. But what does work mean?

Stories about "good" children: Work as a moral education

When the organized working children I interviewed talk about work, they talk about three different but related things: about everything work teaches, about their relationships at work, and about their feelings of responsibility towards their parents. These are the ways that they "bend" the priceless narrative: work is made compatible with education, friends, and family.

¹⁹ During fieldwork, Rafael Correa was president of Ecuador. Correa left power in 2017 and Lenin Moreno, his former Vice-President, took office.

“Work as education” is often the first way working children talk about their experiences. Specifically, they say that work teaches them how to be “good” children. For the interviewees, a good child is smart and savvy, so many point to the practical skills they learn. Cinderella (9) says work teaches you “to do calculations.” Sara (11) says work “teaches children to cross the street.” Diomedes (11) believes work teaches children to “speak in public.” Areli (16) explains that work helps children overcome their anxieties: “[You learn] skills like how to sell, because the first times you sell it’s scary. But after, little by little, I got used to it and now I know how, I lost that fear.”

A good child is also responsible and hardworking. The working children associate work with moral values like self-sufficiency, thrift, honesty, effort, and respect. For Ariel (10), work “lets you experience what life is really like. It isn’t really like in the telenovelas, it’s different, it’s hard.” Messi (16) agrees: “Working we learn how life is, how life treats you. How to be responsible, attentive, a lot of things.” A good child does her best in a difficult situation.

Most importantly, a good child knows “the value of money.” “I know where money comes from,” says Shakira (12), “how much work and time, how much it took.” Arnold (11) adds: “when I buy something now I know how much it cost. I know how many days it took me to get the money.” This knowledge helps them navigate and appreciate what they have.

In this context, money quantifies effort and accomplishment. Jhymi (16) explains:

The satisfaction when I get paid, that’s the best part. My motivation is that I’ll put in a lot of effort, work hard, and get paid. Like when I get the “*picos*,” the little extras. The owners say that if you sell a jacket and its price is 100 [bolivianos, roughly \$14 USD], then you can ask for 110 and if they buy it at 110 you can keep the 10 [about \$1.42]. If they say no, give me a discount, the most you can discount is to 100 and you don’t get that little extra. But one day I earned so much money because of these extras. I handled the clients and no one asked for the discounts.

Money can also be a surprise or a gift, quantifying another’s generosity. Younger children especially often have stories of people giving them money. Benji (8) remembers:

One day I was sad because I only made 8 dollars and I got off [the bus] and went to buy a [pirated] film. And I got off and this man said to me, are you hungry? And I told him I haven’t eaten and then he gave me ten dollars. Also one day we wanted to go to the Mr.

Joy [a local arcade] and there was five of us and we didn't have money for all five. But then one man gave me 17 dollars. He told us how much are you missing? And we said 17 dollars.

The interviewees do not call this gift money charity. They do not question why adults provide for them. Good children, therefore, may be responsible and smart but they can also be dependent, recipients of another's kindness.

But gift money cannot be humiliating, good children are not victims. Michael (13) recalls: "One time a lady at the bus terminal gave me 25 dollars and said 'Here, because I pity you.' I told her 'I don't want your pity' and I gave it back." In this case, the gift was condescending and unacceptable. Work teaches that not all money is equal.

If work teaches children how to be good, it also teaches them how not to be "bad." When I began this research I expected working children to compare their experiences to that of idle, affluent children. Instead, most compare their work to the activities of "unlawful" children. They complain that adults treat them like "criminals." "I don't steal, I don't beg," says Aurora (12), "some children do but I don't." Marinet (11) explains: "Some children don't have enough [money] even for bread. Because they can't work they have to beg, some even steal. Some survive in gangs." But although she also has economic needs, she says "I've always worked, I've been good (laughs)." Genesis (12) and Loretta (12) tell me, indignant, of a visit from Ecuador's Vice-President Jorge Glass to the foundation that supports their union: "They [the people in government] don't want to know about us working children. They just say we are children from the streets, like we're all doing drugs or something."²⁰ This offends them because they see themselves as good, hardworking children. They are good, they have value, *because* they are hard at work.

Stories about friends and work-families: Work as a moral performance

²⁰ Scholars and policymakers do in fact distinguish between children "from the street" and children "on the street." The former live in the street while the later only work there.

Work not only teaches children how to be good, it also allows them to show others that they are good. Working children develop relationships with each other and with employers and customers. How much attention, time, and emotion they invest in one group or another depends on the type of work they do. Street vendors have no employer, often meet other working children, and must attract customers who may or may not be interested in the interaction. In contrast, customers come to retail workers, who just have to make sure they complete their purchase. Instead, retail workers have to respond to an employer and usually have less contact with other children. And for some working children, their employer is a parent or a relative.

Especially for younger children, work is an activity you share with your friends. Ronaldinho (11) laughs as he shares the story of when he yelled at his friend from one bus to another. Marisol (14) likes that she sells candy with her cousin and “that way we sell faster and play together.” Z (13) pushes a wheelbarrow to carry produce in an outdoor market and, while this is a job you do alone, he likes that his friends are also there, “we can hang out if its slow.” Working with friends is also a way to stay safe. C.J. (13), for instance, says:

They almost killed me once! (laughs). We were at the Trebol, I was with Alex. We were selling a box of candy and I gave him 3 dollars because we had made 20, 23 dollars, so I gave him 3. Then some kids almost mugged us, they were going to stab us! Luckily I didn't give them anything and luckily they didn't do anything. I think Alex's face scared them (laughs).

The working children also turn employers into work-families. While some children and adolescents share stories about abusive employers – Dayla (16) casually tells me about the time her boss beat her and pulled her hair after someone stole store merchandise – they more often speak of employers affectionately – Dayla, a few minutes later, says: “Despite the yelling and the mistreatment, my boss sometimes treats me like a daughter. She will say to me ‘*hija*’ you should do this, you should do that, you should be careful, like a mother.” Similarly, when other retail workers explain why they choose to stay or leave a job, they do not talk about payment, difficulties, or hours but say their choice depended on their relationship with their employer.

Street vendors and service workers interact more with customers and, while they don't call them family, they call them friends. Edson (16) says, "[work] is nice, fun, you get to know people, people get to know you, they talk to you when you serve them right. Your friends are the other workers but also your customers." Ovidio (12) says that what he likes most about work is "that I meet new people, I learn about new experiences, they give me advice and tell me not to stop studying. So I listen to them and feel more motivated in life." Violeta (18) is upset that another girl "stole" one of her regular customers because "We talked and laughed and had so much fun, I really thought she was my friend."

When handling their customers, these children make a point of being polite, respectful, even cute. "I always say good morning or good afternoon when I get on the bus," explains Jefferson (13). Gohan (11) says "I like to help people, like when there's a lady with a baby I give her my seat." Some of the younger street vendors sing in order to boost their sales. Diomedes (11) says "I learned a sad song from the radio so sometimes I just sing it and sometimes people cry. One day they recorded me singing and they gave me two dollars." And when confronted by rude customers, several children make an effort not to respond. Ovidio (12) tells me about "people who criticize you or call you out for working." When I ask what he does in these cases he shrugs: "I'd rather not say anything so that they can't say I'm a brat (*malcriado*). Because if you answer these things they say you're a bad kid and they assume that you don't go to school, they start to discriminate you. I prefer to stay quiet, I pretend I didn't hear."

These children, in short, work hard to manage their relationships and show that they are good children. The cultural sociology of markets tells us that marketplaces can be "a dramaturgical stage where [an actor] is taking on a role, offering a performance, interacting with an audience" (Wherry 2012: 130). The interviewed working children make use of this stage to show friends, employers, and customers that they are playful, respectful, reliable, cute, willing to listen to advice, polite in confrontations. But work also helps them manage a far more important relationship: their relationship with their parents.

Stories about suffering parents: Work as an act of love

Ovidio is 12. He sells candy on the street and in minibuses in La Paz. He remembers how he started working as a street performer at age 8:

As I said, in my family we were eleven. My mother worked here and there but there wasn't enough money. She even started to get sick because she was going everywhere to work. She started to get sick and my dad also worked but there wasn't enough. So I, with my brother, my two older brothers, we started to say let's help mom. So we looked for a job that we could do and we started juggling and doing jumps. We discovered that you only earn a little money at that but it still helped, so that's how we started.

Dayla is 16. She works at a shop selling jeans and, on weekends, sells fruit in a market in La Paz. She also wanted to help her mother since age 6:

[I started] because of family troubles, because my dad and my mom didn't have the best connection and they always started arguing about money. I would listen and think, I should go to work, my mom is suffering too much. There were four of us. It would be better if she took care of the other three and I took care of myself. That's why I started, and also because I was curious. But mostly because I wanted to help my mom so that she wouldn't have to worry about me.

Michael is 13. He sells candy on the streets and in buses in Quito. He also takes care of his siblings and his home when his mother travels for work. He explains:

I have an older brother who got married and now has a son and lives in Latacunga (a city south of Quito). I have a sister too but she doesn't live with us anymore. And my mother sometimes gets sad. She thinks about how they grew up and don't visit and sometimes she cries. But we all support her and tell her that she has three other children and that the three of us will never abandon her. We tell her that we'll always take care of her. We help her like that until she feels better.

Work, for Michael, for Dayla, for Ovidio, is an act of familial love. Work is their way of helping their mothers, of making them feel better.

Almost all the interviewees have large families, with 3 to 7 brothers and sisters. About two thirds of the working children live with both their parents or one parent and a stepparent. The other third, like Michael, live only with their mother. Only one girl lives only with her father. Many parents are self-employed in the informal market – they too sell fruit, newspapers, or candy on the

street, in markets or in public plazas. Several mothers are domestic workers in another person's home. Many fathers are construction workers, taxi drivers, or security guards. Only a few parents own a store, and their children work less. All these families experience economic hardships that brings stress and apprehension to one or both parents.

For the working children, usually the object of affection and concern is their mother, as the above examples show. But some also worry about their father and want to help and support him. Working children use the term "suffering" to describe their parents and many claim to work in order to alleviate this suffering (see also Haugen 2007). Only two interviewees say their parents have yelled or beaten them for not working or for spending their work money. The other children either choose not to share those stories or have not had this experience.

The children fear getting their parents in trouble, like being stopped by the police. In Ecuador, many believe that their parents will go to jail if they are caught working, which is not true. The children also worry about worrying their parents. Benji (8) remembers:

It happened to my brother because he used to go off and sell by himself. And you see I got home but he didn't get home and my mom was so worried, she kept asking where's your brother? I said I didn't know and she kept asking, has he come home? At midnight he came home. Or maybe ten, it was ten. My mom was so worried, she even hit him. She was crying and worried. It was bad.

Several interviewees talk about the pride they feel when bringing money to their parents. "My best day," says Loretta (12), "was when I found some money and so had a lot of money and gave it all to my mom. She was so happy." Some children also say that they have impressed their parents with their work. Justin (11) remembers: "I didn't use to go out because I was shy. But one time, when I was 7, I told my mom – because she knew I was shy and wouldn't go out – that day I impressed her because I told her 'mom, I'm ready, I can go out to sell.'"

Many children work in order to complete family projects: to feed the family, to pay for school, to pay family debts, to pay the rent, to build a new room for a new sibling, to pay for electricity, cable, or Internet connection. Even when the older children and adolescents pay for their

own things – usually clothes and cell phone service – they phrase it as a way of helping their parents. Kevin (16) explains: “If I buy this for myself than I don’t have to ask my father for anything, he has enough problems.”

In her study of nineteenth century debates over child labor in the United States, Zelizer (1985) finds that “advocates of child labor legislation were determined to regulate not only factory hours but family feeling. They introduced a new cultural equation: If children were useful and produced money they were not being properly loved” (72). Child work, in other words, was incompatible with parental love. But the organized working children in Bolivia and Ecuador believe the reverse. To properly love a parent is to help, to work. A good child is dutiful, caring, responsible, she doesn’t allow her parent to suffer.

Against child labor legislation

So what do working children think about child labor legislation? If work is so meaningful should all children be allowed to work? In any activity?

The short answer is no. Unlike some of the working children’s movement representatives, the working children I spoke to *do* believe that there should be a minimum age for employment, although most do not think this minimum age should be 14. Andrea Lynette (10) says children should work “since they’re 5, so that they learn what it’s like little by little.” Juan (10) says “6 or 7 because since then they are old enough to reach things. Because they need to work to help their mother.” For Edson (16), children should work “out of necessity since they are 9 years old or 8 because, economically, they need it.” Most say that children should work after they have turned 8 or 10, a minority say 15. Only Fernanda (10), says the minimum age should be 18. When I ask her why, given that she is younger, she responds: “That’s okay, because I help my parents.”

Although they propose a minimum age below the international standard, the interviewed children and adolescents do think some children are too young to work.

Kevin (16): Eight is a good age to start working because if we make a little kid, a five-year-old, sell that's illogical (laughs). That kid doesn't know how to handle money or give out change.

Troye (14): (also laughs). But there are little kids that work like that, I've seen it. Those parents have gone too far.

Kevin (16): That's too much, that's just illogical.

Interviewer: Why is it illogical?

Troye (14): (raises her eyebrows). Because after you're eight or whatever you've developed your thinking, your judgment. I don't know, kids become more prudent. (She looks at me like I'm crazy).

In other words, there are some children who are too vulnerable, too immature, too dependent to work. The difference is that several interviewees think that "maturity" comes earlier in life. Many, like Jhymi (16), distinguish between an "ideal world" and "reality."

Children are too delicate, too naïve, too innocent. Adolescents are sensitive and sentimental, they are bipolar (laughs). I think we should work when we become adults, but unfortunately that just can't be. So many children have needs, they need to work to survive. Needs force children to work at an earlier age.

Hence, working children, to a certain extent, *do* subscribe to a "priceless" view of childhood, except they bend this view and say that, in certain circumstances, "priceless" children might have to adapt and work. The stories they tell about themselves and their own experiences with work are different to their opinions on "children" as a cultural construction. Children make exceptions when it comes to their lives, not when they speak of "children" in general.

The interviewees do not believe that all child work is acceptable. Here they are more aligned with the movement leaders. They name mining, construction work, drug trafficking, and prostitution as forms of child labor that should be prohibited. Gef (17) explains:

I once went to the mine to see what it was like but it was too dark and you can't see anything, it smells horrible. And you know all about the deaths. Two of my uncles died in the mine and my brother has also had accidents. So because my brother, and also my dad, have had accidents I started working, but never in mining.

The interviewees also say that children shouldn't do heavy lifting. Angel (14) says "I've seen a kid who is 10, 15 years old and does heavy work. That isn't good for his growth."

Working children insist that children should not be *forced* to work. "It should be a choice," says Scarlet (17). "I know a neighbor that forces her son to work and that's not right." When I ask what work they think children should be allowed to do, they mention work they have experience with: selling on the streets or on buses, shining shoes, helping at home, taking care of younger siblings or small animals. They consider these safe, instructional, moral forms of labor. These are exceptions to the "priceless" view.

The working children rarely think advocates of child labor legislation have their best interests at heart. Mostly, they believe that people who oppose child labor aren't listening. "They've never worked so they don't understand," says Justin (11). "They've always had money and have been raised differently," says Mexico (11). For Shakira (12), "they want to keep us poor." The most common answer is "they don't understand," they don't see their work as moral.

The working children I spoke to do not see themselves as victims. They do not believe their work is economic exploitation. They believe that child labor laws brand them as "bad children" and this goes against everything they are trying to do. "A woman got up on the bus," says C.J. (12), "and started yelling: Where is your mother? Why are you working? She started yelling that I shouldn't be here, that I should be playing, it was horrible." "A lady yelled at me on the street once," says Ronaldinho (11). "She yelled 'child labor is illegal!' even though I wasn't doing anything to her." "One day I was sweeping in front of the store," says Jhymi (16), "and the lady next door yelled at me and said this isn't the market, what are you even doing here? Aren't you a kid?" "I hate the dirty looks," says Dills (16), "sometimes people stare you down and don't want to pay you just because you're a kid." These humiliating experiences shape the children's ideas about child labor laws and child advocates.

In Ecuador, unlike Bolivia, several children also mention fearing the police. Many have stories about hiding from the police or being questioned or having policemen take away their

merchandise. Krili (11) remembers: “Once they took my cousin and they called her mother and they said that they would take her away if she keeps working. So I hide if I see a policeman, I get behind the trash cans or go into a store.”

The working children share many stories like these, usually as examples of their worst day at work. When I ask specifically whether they or someone they know has ever been in danger while working, some do mention that they have gotten lost or been mugged or been scared of their customers. But these stories rarely come up spontaneously, not like the stories of being yelled at for working. For many, their worst day was when someone questioned whether they were “good children.” Ariel (10) summarized it this way: “They say what we do is illegal, they treat us like criminals. But I’m not doing anything wrong. I just need to work to help my family.” Child labor laws, in their eyes, attack their sense of achievement and moral worth.

Discussion

Bending and breaking the global narratives against child labor

Global institutions, organizations, and actors state that work is bad for children because it denies them their childhood. For these actors, childhood is priceless. Children are vulnerable, innocent, playful, cute, immature, passive, and dependent. The transnational working children’s movement, in contrast, argues that children are resilient, responsible, hardworking, strong, competent, and independent. They break from the hegemonic view and propose an alternative, political view of childhood. They believe that certain types of child work can be good and empowering for children.

The working children I spoke to seem to be somewhere in the middle. They agree that work can be good, but they reconcile it with the priceless views. Like global actors, the working children believe that children should learn, play, and live in the family. Unlike global actors, they believe that work can be part of these spaces: work teaches, it fosters relationships, and it strengthens their bond with their parents. Work does not pollute childhood; it helps them be more moral children.

Children’s value is emotional, but many believe that work brings them this emotional value. Working children, in other word, bend the global narrative. They disagree on the means but agree on the ends (Merton 1938), accommodating the global narrative to their local experiences.

Table 8. The different views of childhood

	Priceless view	Political view	Dutiful view
	Hegemonic view	Moral breaking: “Either/or”	Moral bending: “And/but”
Associated actors	ILO, UNICEF, most governments.	Working children’s movement leaders.	Rank and file members of the working children’s movement.
View of the child	Vulnerable, innocent, playful, cute, passive, dependent on others.	Resilient, responsible, hardworking, strong, competent, independent.	Resilient, innocent, playful, cute, hardworking, competent, part of meaningful social relationships.
Value of the child	Emotional value.	Political value.	Emotional value.
Space for the child	Home, school.	School, streets, negotiating table.	Home, school, streets.
Role of the adult	Adults should protect and promote rights of children.	Adults should collaborate and empower children.	Children should help suffering parents.
View of child work	Work pollutes and harms children, it “robs children of their childhood.”	Some work can be empowering, a form of political participation.	Work is an act of love from children for their parents.

The organized working children in Bolivia and Ecuador see children as innocent, vulnerable, and playful, but not passive or immature. They see children as resilient and hardworking, but not strong and independent. Rather, they believe they and other children are both dependent and dependable. They believe that they learn and grow through their work. Most importantly, work allows them to care for their parents. For them, childhood should be “dutiful.”

What policymakers and activists campaigning in the global fight against child labor don’t always understand is that children are the heroes of their own stories (Polletta et al. 2011). They don’t see themselves as victims waiting to be saved and they don’t see global activists as saviors. Rather they associate these activists with rude strangers, with the police, with a prohibiting state. The working children often see themselves as the protagonists, heroes rescuing, or at least aiding, their suffering parents. They feel surrounded by allies, mentors, sidekicks who can be other working

children, benevolent employers, or generous customers and strangers. The range of stories they can tell is shaped by globally circulating ideas about childhood – about political and priceless children. But they are able to interpret and adapt these global ideas, making meaning in their own lives.

Global campaigns against child labor tend to assume that working children and their families “break from” the priceless view of childhood and so they produce advocacy and awareness campaigns that try to teach people about the importance of education, the potential harms of child labor, and children’s rights (ILO no date). This view, however, is too binary and does not capture people’s nuanced interpretations on the ground. Working children and their families don’t always conduct moral breaking, using an “either/or” logic where child labor is either good or bad. The working children I spoke to perform moral bending, they say “and/but” instead. This does not mean that policymakers and activists need to stop making campaigns and policy recommendations. It does mean that they need to engage more with the working children, find out what they value, what their meaningful relationships are, and how they reconcile these values and relationships to ideas about their work. Campaigns that aim to help working children should be more iterative, should involve more dialogue with working children. Activists need to understand how people bend their logic, therefore addressing these “pressure points.”

At the start of this chapter I asked why some working children would defend their right to work. The answer is that they see work as a moral practice. Through work, they learn to be good, they show others how they are good, and they help relieve their parents’ suffering. Just like “morality is the structuring principle in the worldviews of American workers” (Lamont 2000: 51), morality is the structuring principle in the lives of working children in two countries of the global South. Work is intimately tied to their sense of self-worth.

Potential limitations

How can we make sure that the stories working children told were not for my benefit as a researcher? How can we know whether they really have such positive views about work, and do

not believe something more mixed or complicated (Song 1996: 108)? There is no easy way to answer these questions. Researchers studying childhood must always deal with the fact that children tend to tell adults what they think adults want to hear (Eder and Fingerson 2001: 182). Even though I introduced myself by name, many interviewees called me '*profe*' or 'teach,' short for teacher. They raised their hands and looked at me before they spoke. Although they often laughed and seemed relaxed in our conversations, it is unlikely that they would share negative stories about their families or their work experiences.

Still, even if the stories they told me are an idealized version of the stories they tell themselves, it is relevant that this is the way working children want to appear to others. They could have assumed that I saw work as bad for children, like many strangers they meet. They could have assumed that I saw work as empowering, like many adult collaborators working with their unions. But the stories they told and opinions they shared do not fit either set of expectations. They were able to present a new set of stories in their attempts to convince me that work, in their view, is good.

Working children receive several different ideas about work and childhood from several different sources. They are influenced by adult collaborators (Myers 2009: 154) but do not agree with all of the movement's stances. They are influenced by their peers (Pugh 2009) but can disagree during and across our conversations. They are influenced by their teachers, by their employers, by their customers, by local and foreign popular culture (as evidenced in their choice of pseudonyms). And they are influenced by their parents, who also tend to think of child work as "help" and as an education (Togunde and Weber 2007), but who may not frame child work in such strong moral terms, who may also think of their children as priceless, "the most treasured object and [...] the focal point in life" (Ike and Twumasi-Ankrah 1999: 109). This study cannot show where children's ideas about work and childhood come from, although it seems likely that they come from all of these different sources. This study *can* show how a group of working children want to be seen.

Here I have analyzed the meanings of work and childhood that underpin the stories working children tell. We need more research on how these stories are shaped by institutional contexts and

unequal distributions of power (Polletta et al. 2011). Stories are texts but are also “social performances that are interactively constructed, institutionally regulated, and assessed by their audiences in relation to hierarchies of discursive credibility” (110). If this chapter has focused on working children’s stories, then we need more research on their storytelling practices. The next step is to study how these practices are enabled and constrained by broader social structures.

The working children’s movement in Bolivia was successful, it has already shaped a nation’s legislation. Ecuador will probably not change its laws like Bolivia, Ecuador’s government has claimed that its progress against child labor is one of the administration’s greatest triumphs (El Telégrafo 2014). But despite these two countries’ differences, several organized working children in both Bolivia and Ecuador see their work as part of their moral identity. Regardless of the government’s stance, for these children their work is emotional, personal, and moral.

People who create legislation, interventions, and policies mean to bring “safety, liberty, dignity and education for all children of the world” (Satyarthi 2016). But they must deal with the different ways working children understand dignity in relation to work. Social actors should aim to ensure what is best for working children. This does not mean agreeing with all of the movements’ requests. It does mean understanding where these requests are coming from, how working children may be bending or excusing their work in the face of moral narratives against child labor. It means understanding how working children ask for “the right to work.”

Conclusion: Towards a cultural sociology of child labor

In this dissertation, I have shown that globalization affects morality in markets. Public debates over child labor are shaped by local but also global representations and cultural codes regarding children and adults, innocence and corruption, the sacred and the profane. Although scholars have argued that it is harder to spread representations that touch on local ideas of the sacred (Halliday and Osinsky 2006: 448), norms on children's rights and against child labor have been adapted around the world. What is more, these norms do *not* circulate "without context" (Bourdieu 1999). I have shown that these norms are written and rewritten by intermediary actors who contend with the context in different ways.

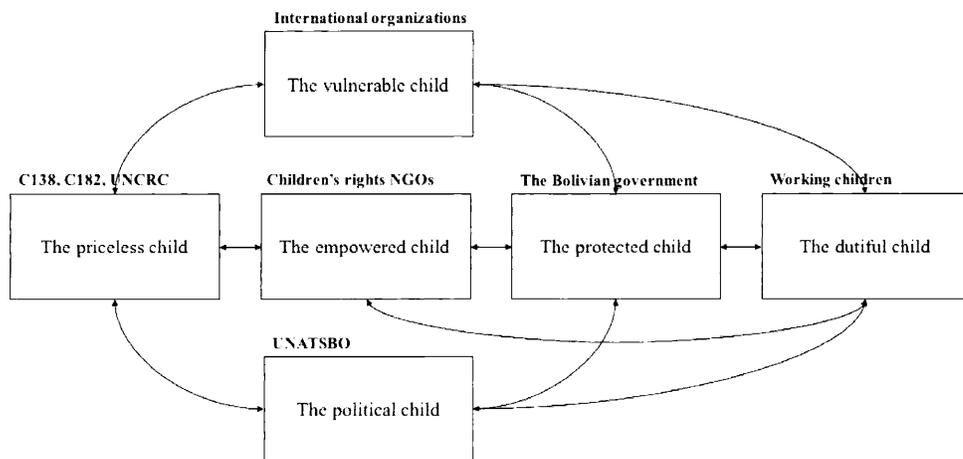
To recap: International actors transform representations and norms into global texts with cultural, institutional, and textual baggage. Different cultural brokers then translate these texts, interpreting and rewriting their meaning. They subsequently perform their interpretations for a local audience, drawing on global and local background representations. Bolivia changed its child labor laws in part because of local practices and ideas about child labor, but also because working children were able to embody the global ideal of the priceless child, therefore temporarily accruing cultural power. In other words, to reject one global norm – minimum age standards – Bolivia first had to accept another – the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the priceless view of childhood. In local debates about the legitimacy of market actors, people must contend with global representations and their multiple, often contradictory meanings.

In this dissertation, I have also shown how working children make sense of global representations. The working children in Bolivia and Ecuador actively and deliberately contend with global ideas of the priceless child. They may be influenced by adults and peers but they still reach their own conclusions. Working children do not reject global representations but qualify and bend them. They creatively adapt the available translations, marking a difference between "their case" and "other children." And even though Bolivia and Ecuador have different institutional

contexts – in one country, children can work (under certain conditions) starting at age 10, in the other children can only legally work after turning 15 – working children in both places talk about work as a source of moral value and pride, as a way of properly loving their family. Representations, it would seem, matter in their lives more than laws.

Figure 4 summarizes how different actors in Bolivia tend to read the “priceless child.” They all accept the representation’s central tenant, that children’s value is emotional, not productive, that children are sacred emblems of human innocence. They all value education and are against child exploitation. But they also all tell different stories about child labor, about priceless children. They take the same source and translate it in different ways, emphasizing different aspects of the idea of “pricelessness”.

Figure 4. Local translations of the “priceless child.”



Members of international organizations usually emphasize children’s *vulnerability*. They tell a tragic story of oppressed, forgotten children. They focus on the possibility of harm. They talk about the state’s responsibility towards children and see themselves as advisors to the state. They believe those who tell alternative stories are overlooking very real, very grave dangers.

Members of children's rights NGOs, in contrast, emphasize children's potential. They often tell a more heroic story of *empowered*, or potentially empowered, children. NGOs want to provide direct services to children and to help children to learn and exercise their rights. Like international organizations, they are concerned with harm and want to eradicate the worst forms of child labor but they also want to encourage children to exert their right to participation. Their main focus is on children, not just the state. They believe that those who speak only of child vulnerability are falling back into an old-fashioned, paternalistic view of childhood, are not recognizing children as *subjects*, not objects.

The leaders and adult collaborators of UNATSBO tell a heroic story as well. They take the NGOs' tale and push it further, talking specifically of children's *political* empowerment and potential to bring widespread social progress. They want children to be politically organized, to participate in political decisions and debates, to be acknowledged by society as political subjects. These translators do not condone child exploitation and argue that certain activities that fall under the worst forms of child labor shouldn't be called labor at all; child prostitution or child trafficking are crimes, not forms of employment. And these translators still subscribe to a priceless view of childhood, they still see children as emotionally valuable and fundamentally innocent. But this innocence brings with it special wisdom, children are "truth-tellers" and agents of change. They believe that others disagree because they disrespect children and have not shared their experiences.

The Bolivian government, I have shown, has to contend with all these different translations and translate C138 on its own. Within the government, some actors side with UNATSBO and talk about political children, while others side with international organizations and talk of vulnerable children. The official position is that the Bolivian government is pursuing the same global end – protecting priceless children, lowering rates of child labor – but through different means – by making certain forms of work legal and attacking the determinants of work. The government's story, therefore, is heroic but it shifts the attention away from working children and onto the state. The new protagonist is the state, who steps in, takes charge, and plays by its own rules. Working

children may have been involved in changing the law, but ultimately this is the triumph of Evo Morales and his party. Children, in this view, are side-characters, *protected* and saved by the heroic government. The government, in many ways, emphasizes the passivity inherent in representations of the priceless child.

And the working children and adolescents themselves? They do not simply adopt an existing interpretation. They too interpret the idea of the priceless child, or, at least, available local translations of this idea. Working children tell a domestic love story. Unlike the adult translators, they do not talk about changing “society.” They do not talk about political engagement or political victimhood. Work is their way of loving and saving their long-suffering parents. What is more, their love story is special, in their view their situation is not like that of other children. Other children are oppressed, exploited, mistreated. Other children are victims who should be saved from work. Not them. These interviewees internalize representations of the priceless child, they claim that their value is emotional, not productive. But, in their eyes, *work is what brings them emotional value*. They want to be good children and work is the best way of being good. They believe that others disagree with them because others assume that they are thieves, lazy, or somehow bad children. Rank and file members of working children’s movements tell stories of a *dutiful* child.

What are the implications of this research for sociology and for policy on child labor? First, this dissertation hopes to contribute to economic sociology. As discussed in the introduction, this research invites other economic sociologists to look beyond the local market or the nation and explore how economic practices are embedded in processes of cultural globalization. It invites researchers to look at the global South, at how the legacies of colonialism, imperialism, neo-liberal expansion, and discourses of development and human rights are influencing local debates over the moral legitimacy of economic actors and practices. But we also need to ask how globalization shapes the global North, how countries seemingly independent from global pressures must deal with the global diffusion of moral meanings. This research shows that moral debates are never

exclusively local, that ideas about “the social imaginary of markets” (Spillman 1999: 1049) move across cultural and political borders.

In recent years, economic sociology has experienced a “relational turn.” Zelizer has moved away from research on cultural representations in the public sphere and towards more micro-level interactions, asking how people use money and work to negotiate the meaning of their social ties (Zelizer 2005; 2012, see also Bandelj 2012; Block 2012). Social actors, for example, might reinforce or change the meaning of a relationship by awarding the other party a payment, an entitlement, a gift, or a bribe (Zelizer 1998). Zelizer has even written about child labor as a relational activity. Reviewing empirical studies of children’s economic activities, she argues that through work children negotiate their ties with the adults, even though they are located in an unequal position of power (Zelizer 2002). Children help define a practice as “help” or “work,” “appropriate” or “inappropriate,” depending on who is the adult involved. Similarly, Bandelj and Lanuza (2015) write that in immigrant families, children do not work out of instrumental concerns or as expressions of cultural collectivism. Rather, “how, when, and why children make productive contributions to their households” depends on the “dynamic negotiation of economic and social relations within and outside of immigrant families” (427). This research has been incredibly fruitful and has pointed to new ways in which cultural meanings shape economic life. My dissertation, however, reminds us to ask where these cultural meanings come from: Zelizer, Bandelj, and Lanuza don’t probe the narratives of family, responsibility, and love that children and adults draw from in these negotiations, narratives that, as I have shown, move around the world and are transformed along the way. My dissertation offers a first step to explore the link between macro-level public sphere debates and micro-level interpersonal negotiations: the children I spoke to make similar distinctions as those Zelizer, Bandelj, and Lanuza discuss. They do so because international actors have written texts, intermediary translators have translated these texts, and they, in turn, interpret, twist, and bend the translations.

Second, this dissertation addresses literature on cultural globalization. This literature is saturated with terms denoting movement: flow, diffusion, networks, circulation (Appadurai 1996; Castells 2010; García Canclini 1995; Hannerz 1996; Lechner and Boli 2005; Meyer et al. 1997; Pieterse 1996). It uses several metaphors to describe the intersection of global and local codes: glocalization, hybridity, creolization, or *mélange*, to name only a few (Burke 2009; Hannerz 2000 [1991]; Pieterse 1994; Robertson 1995). This literature, however, is also stuck: scholars increasingly accumulate empirical examples and invent new theoretical terms without adding complexity to our understandings, without pointing to cultural mechanisms that allow globalization to happen (Levitt and Merry 2009: 443). This study joins a growing group of scholars who want to address these shortcomings, who ask about the people involved in that movement, who want to uncover the cultural work that they do (Kaufman and Patterson 2005; Kuipers 2015; Levitt and Merry 2009). This dissertation shows how tools from the humanities and cultural sociology allow us to uncover social dynamics, how translation and performance theory helps us better understand how moral representations move.

Third, this project contributes to the sociology of childhood. As several authors have noted, this subfield is consistently overlooked by mainstream sociology (Pugh 2014). Researchers therefore feel the need to reiterate the subfield's main findings: that children are active, not passive, that children are strategic, not naïve, that "childhood" is a cultural and historical construction that is not the same in every society (Corsaro 2015; James and James 2001; Pugh 2014). This dissertation not only confirms but expands these central findings. Children are active, not passive; moreover, they are self-reflexive and actively create their own representations of childhood. Children are strategic, not naïve; moreover, they strategically play with representations of childhood for an adult audience. "Childhood" is a cultural and historical construction that is not the same in every society; and yet a particular representation of childhood – Zelizer's "priceless child" – has been spread around the world. Today, children on the global periphery must respond to this

globally-circulating representation and either accept, reject, or, more likely, transform it by telling stories and enacting performances.

Fourth, and most importantly, this dissertation hopes to impact research and public policy on child labor, specifically by introducing the first elements of a *cultural sociology of child labor*. A cultural sociological approach to markets differs from a standard economic approach to markets in four ways (Wherry 2012: 130). It assumes that:

1. Actors are pragmatic but not rational, meaning that people act in markets based on their emotions, habits, rituals, and goals. In this research I find that children work to cover basic needs but also to feel like “good children.” Children work because going to sell in a market with a parent or sibling has become a daily ritual. Children work because they tell themselves moral stories of how work will help them escape poverty, garner respect, share with friends, and achieve their dreams.
2. Economic goals are material but also ideal, meaning that certain goals are thinkable or unthinkable, common sense or bizarre, commendable or “just plain wrong,” based on shared cultural and moral understandings. In this research I show that children work because work is within the realm of possibility: their parents worked, their siblings work, their friends often work. Children work because not working would seem wrong, it would be lazy, selfish, a betrayal to the overworked parent. Children work because this is what “children like me” do, some are surprised to learn that I did not work as a child.
3. To achieve these goals, actors use different strategies that must be meaningful, must make cultural and moral sense. Market strategies are “not simply a way to change her state from A to B, a transition that may be accomplished a variety of ways (technical feasibility) but that should be accomplished in a way that makes sense to her (cultural fit)” (Wherry 2012: 130). Similarly, in this research I uncover how working children conduct their work: they

creatively perform cuteness, politeness, playfulness, embodying cultural representations of priceless children. I also show how, for working children, informal market work *is* compatible with representations of pricelessness. Cultural fit can be bent and extended. These children do not talk about calculating efficiency, looking for loopholes, or cheating. These strategies are technical but not cultural or moral options, at least not in the context of our discussions.

4. Economic life takes place within cultural and moral structures that are like a language: relatively autonomous, imaginatively constraining, and expressed and transformed through public performances and negotiations. People make sense of the world through cultural lenses and, as social scientists, our job is to reconstruct those lenses. Wherry (2012) writes: “it is our task to analyze the haze of meanings that enable people to justify why they do what they do” (124). This dissertation is a first step at reconstructing that “haze of meaning” that allow different actors to oppose or defend certain forms of child labor. I show how people interpret a globally-circulating story of childhood and tell variations of that story, changing its genre, changing its focus, giving importance to different parts, making it compatible or incompatible with minimum age standards.

A cultural sociology of child labor asks us to stop thinking of culture in terms of “values” or “ideology,” to stop treating culture as an obstacle that must be removed, the result of local interactions, or as an unchanging, primordial container determining the fate of a community. A cultural sociology of child labor asks us to stop talking of “sensitizing” local populations or of work as “expressing traditional culture.” Rather, we need to start learning each other’s language, the basic terms, the turns of phrases, the unspoken assumptions. Only by truly understanding how, exactly, different actors agree and disagree can we begin to create true and effective communication.

Different languages often interact with each other, borrow from each other, change each other. People can translate ideas from one language to another, although meaning is sometimes lost in translation. Often, the target language is changed in this exchange. Often, this exchange is unequal and underscored by power. The same is true for culture: narratives and representations can move from one “cultural grammar” to another. But this only occurs when intermediaries, cultural brokers, interpret and rewrite narratives for the target audience. The globalization of children’s rights is only possible because there are strategic translators who rework these norms and make them intelligible in the local context. And just like words and phrases can have several different meanings, so can global norms and international conventions. Bolivian translators disagree on the meaning of C138 because they are reading the same text in different ways, unpacking and repacking its cultural, institutional, and textual baggage.

For this dissertation, I talked to working children. We need further research on the narratives told by their families, whether single parent families, two parent families, extended families, families where a parent is sick or absent. The economic literature on child labor assumes that parents are making a rational calculation, that they would rather not send their children to work but that this is a luxury they cannot afford (Basu and Van 1998). Interviewees often make assumptions about parents as well, they talk about unacceptable “lazy parents” or understandable “incapacitated parents,” of cases where “the mother is sick” or “the child is an orphan” to discuss why child labor might be necessary. But, with only a few exceptions (Invernizzi 2003; Ramírez Sánchez 2007), we don’t know enough about parents think about child labor. We need to explore how parents interpret, bend, or reject narratives of the priceless child. We also need to talk to children in the worst forms of child labor. Studies have shown that while minimum age laws might not necessarily impact children’s work in the urban informal market, they can help children trapped in coerced and forced labor (Edmonds 2014). These children’s lives and relationship to minimum age laws may be markedly different than that of the children interviewed here.

And what about Bolivia? What became of the controversial law? I write four years after the working children of UNATSBO marched towards the Presidential Palace. In the intervening time, little has changed for Bolivian working children. The problem, according to government officials, is lack of resources and of institutional capacity (Stewart 2017). Very little money has been allocated to follow up on the law. Those responsible for overseeing whether or not children are authorized to work are the Child and Adolescence Advocacy Offices (“*defensoría de la niñez y adolescencia*”) in each municipality. But not every municipality even has a Child and Adolescence Advocacy Office. The government only deals with about 30 or 40% of all authorizations sent (Lind 2016). This means that most children will probably keep working without state permission or protections. And, while a census of children working on the streets has finally been conducted, the results have yet to be published on the National Institute of Statistics (INE) website. We still don’t have updated information on the reach of child labor in Bolivia, the last time the phenomenon was measured was in 2008.

In some ways, the situation of working children might actually be worse, although not as a direct result of the law. According to experts, Bolivia is currently entering an economic crisis which could make the lives of working children more precarious (Stewart 2017). Also, many NGOs and local foundations that supported working children in the past are closing. According to one government official:

I think they got tired of fighting, of plowing in the sand (“*arar en arena*”). Besides, there is a little fear towards the state’s position and this new code. Many of [the local foundations and NGOs] live off of international cooperation, and the cooperation has taken a step back [from Bolivia]. We have to wait and see. (Nancy Alé, Head of the human rights unit for children and adolescents in the Ombudsman’s office).

As I conducted fieldwork, one of the most important foundations supporting UNATSBO was shut, dealing the movement a strong blow.

I don’t know if they’ve told you, but they are going to close Fundación la Paz, we’re going to be left without support or a place to meet, because that foundation has been supporting

us for 17 years. And Caritas is leaving the country too, or something like that. So we have to see. (Liz Castro, National representative of UNATSBO).

We have to see what will happen with UNATSBO, but it is now clear that the new childhood law has not had the effects its proponents intended. At best, the situation of working children in Bolivia has stayed the same. At worst, the law's inefficiency proves that different translators have not devised a plausible alternative to C138.

Still, Bolivia's new childhood law, with its exceptions to the minimum age for employment, has changed public narratives of child labor in the country, granting a group of economic actors the moral legitimacy they so craved. Today, UNATSBO representatives proudly continue to tell journalists how "We fought for the cause of children to be respected and we demanded our proposal to be heard" (cited in Stewart 2017), how "the law gave us a voice" (cited in Lund 2016). If Bolivia's new law reveals anything, it is how much working children have wanted that voice, how excluded these children have felt. It is telling that working children feel stigmatized and persecuted by child labor legislation designed to make their lives better.

This dissertation joins a long list of sociologists of childhood who ask people to listen to children. Listening to children does not mean giving in to what they want – different actors in child labor debates have different competencies and knowledge that add to the broader discussion. But it does mean taking children's opinions seriously. People invested in helping working children need to reconsider how they are communicating their goals, how they are interacting with working children, how they could work together without compromising children's sense of self-worth.

In the introduction, I cited Kailash Satyarthi, who said that the global fight against child labor aims to bring "safety, liberty, dignity and education for all children of the world" (Satyarthi 2016). Different actors are telling different stories about how work relates to children's dignity. By mapping out these stories and putting them side by side, this dissertation has shown where the differences lie, where similarities are found, and where we can build a more productive dialogue. It invites readers to understand why children would ask for "the right to work."

Appendix

Table 1A. *Adult translators interviewed in Bolivia*

Interviewee	Organization
International organizations	
Asked to stay anonymous	Works at local branch of an international organization
Asked to stay anonymous	Works at local branch of an international organization
Asked to stay anonymous	Works at local branch of an international organization
Asked to stay anonymous	Works at local branch of an international organization
Sandra Arellano	Child protection officer at UNICEF
Pamela Agudo	UNICEF consultant
Ryan Caldwell	Political Officer of the United States Embassy in Bolivia
Maria Gracia Morais	Legal expert, UNICEF consultant
International NGOs	
Asked to stay anonymous	Works at regional children's rights NGO
Asked to stay anonymous	Works at international children's rights NGO
Asked to stay anonymous	Works at international children's rights NGO
Luis Stacey	Former Director of the Child Labor Elimination Program of Desarrollo y Autogestión in Bolivia
Marcelo Claros	Legal expert at World Vision Bolivia
Bernardo Pacheco	Participation facilitator in Adolescent and Youth Networks for World Vision
Gustavo Tapia	Research and Evaluation Coordinator, Plan International
Viviana Farfán	National Coordinator of Child Protection, Save the Children
National NGOs	
Asked to stay anonymous	Works at local children's rights foundation
Asked to stay anonymous	Works at local children's rights foundation
Marlene Luna	Director of the Fundación Vamos Juntos
Delia Poma Valverde	Director of the Centro Integral Santa María – Alpacoma
Jorge Toledo	Director of Fundación Arcoiris
Tatiana Quiroga	Works at Fundación Alalay
Julia Velasco	Coordinator of the National News Agency for the Rights of Children
Magdalena Chambilla	Director of Hormigón Armado
UNATSBO	
Asked to stay anonymous	Works at a local foundation that supports UNATSBO
Asked to stay anonymous	Works at a local foundation that supports UNATSBO
Lizeth Castro	Former child worker, former UNATSBO's national representative
Gladys Sarmiento	Former child worker, former UNATSBO leader
Juan David	Current national representative of UNATSBO
Jorge Domic	Director of Fundación La Paz
Isbel Flores	Coordinator of Sarantañani Trabajador and adult collaborator of UNATSBO
Adrian Piejko	Lawyer and adult collaborator of UNATSBO

Cristobal Gonzalez	Educator at Fundación Ave in Cochabamba and adult collaborator of UNATSBO
Luz Rivera	Adult collaborator of UNATSBO
Bolivian government	
Asked to stay anonymous	Member of the Bolivian government
Asked to stay anonymous	Municipal program that provides direct services and attention to working children
Asked to stay anonymous	Municipal program that provides direct services and attention to working children
Asked to stay anonymous	Municipal program that provides direct services and attention to working children
Yuri Callisaya	Director of the Plan to Eliminate the Determinants of Child Labor in the Bolivian Ministry of Labor
Rodolfo Eróstegui	Former Minister of Labor.
Ana Bazan	Responsible for the transversalization of the rights of children in the Ministry of Justice
Raúl Escalante	General director of Childhood and Older Adults in the Ministry of Justice
Nancy Alé	Head of the human rights unit for children and adolescents in the Ombudsman's office
Sandro Delgado	National head of conflicts, Ombudsman's office
Teófila Guarachi	Former representative from the Ombudsman's office of La Paz
Other	
Silvia Escobar	Researcher at CEDLA, Center for Studies of Labor and Agricultural Development
Rafael Loayza	Journalist. Former senator
Miguel Sumi	Departmental President of the La Paz Union of Shoe-Shiners

Table 2A. Working children interviewed in Bolivia

Pseudonym	Age	Work	Details
Elsa	7	Service work	Helps parents in their store
Pablo Escobar ²¹	8	Street vending	Sells candy in city squares
Blanca Nieves	9	Care work	Helps take care of younger sibling
Cinderella	9	Service work	Helps parents in their store
Andrea Lynnette	10	Retail and care work	Used to work in a store. Now takes care of siblings
Ariel	10	Craft and market	Helps a woman cutting cloth. Sells ribbons in the market
Fernanda	10	Service work	Helps parents in their store
Muller	10	Service work	Pushes a wheelbarrow in an outdoor market
Majin Buu	10	Service work	Pushes a wheelbarrow in an outdoor market
Juan	10	Service work	Collects tickets on a minibus
Marinet	11	Service work	Helps parents in their store
Mexico	11	Industry apprenticeship	Assistant in a mechanic workshop
Rapunzel	11	Care work	Takes care of neighbors baby
Arnold	11	Service work	Pushes a wheelbarrow in an outdoor market
Fernando	12	Service work	Helps parents in their store
Aurora	12	Market work	Sells fruit in the local market
Ovidio	12	Street vending	Sells candy on public transportation and is a clown for children's parties
Zeta	13	Service work	Pushes a wheelbarrow in an outdoor market
Ana	13	Domestic work	Helps take care of younger sibling
Angel	14	Market work	Sells sponges in the local market

²¹ For the Bolivian soccer player, not the Colombian drug lord.

Maribel	14	Street vending	Sells newspapers at a stand in a public plaza
Maria	14	Market work	Sells matches and sponges in the local market
Valentina	15	Service work	Works at an internet café
Edson	16	Retail and service work	Helps uncle in a store, is a waiter, and is part of a dance-troupe
Areli	16	Retail work	Sells jeans in a store
Dayla	16	Market work	Sells fruit in the local market
Jhymi	16	Retail work	Sells jeans in a store
Messi	16	Industry apprenticeship	Works in a printing press
Dills	16	Street vending	Helps aunt sell food on the street
Claudia	16	Domestic service	Cooking assistant for a caterer
Jesus	17	Street vending	Helps mother sell food on the streets
Scarlet	17	Domestic service	Cleans a hostel. Used to clean gravestones
Kathaleja	17	Domestic service	Cleans a woman's house
Magaby	17	Domestic service	Is a live-in maid for an upper middle class family
Gef	17	Production work	Makes bread in the bakery of a foundation that supports working children
Caroline	18	Service work	Sells bread from a foundation that supports working children
Violeta	18	Service work	Pushes a wheelbarrow in an outdoor market
Dasha	18	Domestic service	Cleans a family's house and takes care of the children

Table 3A. *Working children interviewed in Ecuador*

Pseudonym	Age	Work	Details
Benji	8	Street vending	Sells candy on public transportation
Gokum	9	Street vending	Sells candy on public transportation
Diomedes Diaz	11	Street vending	Sells candy on public transportation
Sara	11	Street vending	Sells water and ice cream on streets
Justin Bieber	11	Street vending	Sells candy on public transportation
Ronaldinho	11	Street vending	Sells candy on public transportation
Gohan	11	Street vending	Sells candy on public transportation
Krili	11	Street vending	Sells candy on public transportation
C.J.	12	Street vending	Sells candy on public transportation
Shakira	12	Street vending	Sells candy on streets
Loretta	12	Street vending and domestic work	Sells candy on streets. Helps mother cleaning other people's houses
Roxana	12	Craft and domestic work	Makes candles and bracelets
Genesis	12	Craft and domestic work	Makes candles and bracelets, used to sell candy on the streets
Michael Jackson	13	Street vending	Sells candy on public transportation
Nicky Jam	13	Street vending	Sells candy on public transportation and streets
Ozuna	13	Street vending	Sells candy on public transportation
Maluma	13	Industry apprenticeship	Is learning to weld in a foundation that helps working children
Jefferson Montero	13	Street vending	Helps parents sell newspapers
Romeo	14	Industry apprenticeship	Is learning to weld in a foundation that helps working children
Troye Sivan	14	Entertainment work.	Works in a breakdance troupe, does presentations for schools
Jason	14	Street vending	Sells candy on public transportation
Marisol	14	Street vending	Sells candy on public transportation
Tatiana la Baby Flow	15	Street vending	Sells candy on streets
Kevin Roldan	16	Service work	Delivers for a confectionary shop and sells candy on the streets
Checo	16	Industry apprenticeship	Welds and builds shelves in a private company
Estefanía	17	Domestic service	Cleans a woman's house

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