

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Poverty is not ‘another culture’:¹ Against a right of children to work to live

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Abstract

Well-being and protection of all children have widely been associated with universal rights. Simultaneously, though, there is growing advocacy for a right of children to work to live. Drawing on cultural relativist premises, such advocacy strongly correlates with an acceptance of poverty as a condition that is inevitable or simply ‘given’. We advance an argument against a right of children to work to live. The fact that only *poor* children are *compelled* to work should direct analyses to the causes of poverty. A critical engagement with the *politics of development* is necessary as it is often constitutive of relations of impoverishment. We critique Eurocentric perspectives that advocate for child labour and substantiate our argument by drawing on the case example of Bolivia, which lowered the legal age for child labour, only to eventually retract this decision. We demonstrate the link between neoliberal development and a rapid increase in the number of children forced to work to live since the 1980s. The case for a right of children to work to live is not justifiable; but there is a case for abolishing child labour and upholding the right of all children and their families to live in dignity. Poverty is not ‘another culture’.

Keywords: Politics of Poverty; Development; Child Labour; Children’s Rights; Human Rights; Critical Political Economy

Introduction

Don’t just keep telling us ‘stop working’. We work because we have to eat. We work because, for us, it is a necessity. If you really want us to stop working – make sure you solve the problems of our families.²

The protection of children against deprivation and discrimination is an urgent ongoing task. Poor children are increasingly forced to work to live, especially, though not exclusively in countries of the Global South. This phenomenon is not exceptional but widespread,³ and occurs in the

¹Adapted from Barry Hindess, ‘The past is another culture’, *International Political Sociology*, 1:4 (2007), pp. 325–38.

²Statement by a child of a family from India during a workshop: ‘The Concerned for Working Children’ – an organisation in alignment with the NATs (or the Bolivian Union of Working Children) in Latin America, available at: {<http://www.concernedforworkingchildren.org/empowering-children/child-work-and-child-labour/our-stance-on-child-labour/>} accessed 8 January 2022.

³Early in 2020 the number of children forced to work rose to 160 million. Rising poverty compelled 16.8 million more children in the age group of five to eleven years old to labour. See the International Labour Organization (ILO), ‘Child Labour: Global Estimates 2020, Trends and the Road Forward’, p. 8, available at: {<https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-labour-2020-global-estimates-trends-and-the-road-forward/>} accessed 24 August 2021. See also Ionel Zamfir, ‘Child Labour: A Priority for EU Human Rights Action’, Briefing, European Parliament (2019), esp. pp. 3–4, available at: {[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/633142/EPRS_BRI\(2019\)633142_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/633142/EPRS_BRI(2019)633142_EN.pdf)} accessed 8 January 2022.

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context of a strong consensus in support of the protection of children at international, national, and local levels. There are specific international human rights instruments and labour laws aimed at protecting children from discrimination, deprivation, and exploitation. One of the most prominent is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), adopted in 1989.⁴ General Comments No. 20 (2016) and No. 21 (2017) have reiterated the commitment to eradicating child labour and ensuring the protection and well-being of children.⁵ The International Labour Organization (ILO) has likewise been a significant site for developing protections especially for poor children (see in particular Conventions 138 and 182).⁶ Other strategies to mitigate against child labour are conditions attached to development aid, such as those of the European Union, which are tied to the principles of Article 32 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.⁷ In general, therefore, abolitionist principles⁸ inform universalist premises on child labour, even if not always accompanied by a corresponding commitment to address the causes and conditions forcing children to work. Yet, the significance of the latter is not lost on children subjected to poverty, as expressed in our opening quotation.

Many children especially across the Global South, are deprived of fundamental needs to live in dignity primarily due to the fact that their families are subjected to poverty. Poverty has been compounded through neoliberal development and has been reflected in an increase in children compelled to work for survival. Their struggles are exemplified in international children's movements against deprivation and discrimination.⁹ Alongside these struggles, there has been an increase in advocacy for a right of children to work to survive, underpinned by a concern with ensuring that they are protected as 'labourers'.¹⁰ Advocates in favour of the regulation, rather than abolition, of child labour are critical of what they deem to be either unrealistic expectations

⁴All member countries of the United Nations (UN) have ratified the UNCRC, except the United States of America. United Nations Treaty Collection, available at: {https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&tmdsg_no=IV-11&chapter=4} accessed 8 January 2022.

⁵General Comments provide clarifications on how the UNCRC should be interpreted. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 20 on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence, CRC/C/GC/20 (6 December 2016), available at: {<https://www.refworld.org/docid/589dad3d4.html>} accessed 8 January 2022. UNCRC, General comment No. 21 (2017), available at: {<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1304490?ln=en>} accessed 8 January 2022.

⁶See also Zamfir, 'Child Labour', esp. p. 6.

⁷See Zamfir, 'Child Labour', pp. 7–10; on Bolivia, see the European Commission (EC), 'The EU Special Incentive Arrangement for Sustainable Development and Good Governance ('GSP+') assessment of Bolivia, 2018–2019', p. 2, available at: {<https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/10102/2020/EN/SWD-2020-16-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF>} accessed 8 January 2022.

⁸On the significance of abolition for critical struggles over and in colonial capitalism, see Robbie Shilliam, 'The past and the present of abolition: Reassessing Adam Smith's "liberal reward of labour"', *Review of International Political Economy*, 28:3 (2021), pp. 690–711.

⁹See the movement against child labour, 'Global March Against Child Labour', available at: {<https://globalmarch.org/about-us/who-we-are/introduction/>} accessed 8 January 2022. Other examples of struggles to abolish child labour include: Stop Child Labour Coalition, ACE, International Initiative to End Child Labour, Centre for Child Rights, The Eliminating Child Labor in Tobacco-Growing Foundation (ECLT). See: {<https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/organizations-end-child-labor/>} accessed 8 January 2022. More recently, Rajasthan Rising is a movement started by 17-year-old Priyanka Bairwa – who belongs to the Dalit community – against child marriage and for free education in India. Challenging the local practice of child marriage, Bairwa recalls how 'Many villagers called us mad. But we had a clear goal, to reach vulnerable girls in all 33 districts of the state and demand long-term change.' Neha Bhutt, "'We can do anything': The Indian girls' movement fighting child marriage', *Guardian* (13 July 2021), available at: {<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/jul/13/the-indian-girls-movement-fighting-child-marriage>} accessed 8 January 2022.

¹⁰See Olga Nieuwenhuys, 'From child labour to working children's movements', in J. Qvortrup, W. A. Corsaro, and M.-S. Honig (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies* (London, UK and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 289–300 (p. 296). For those advocating for a right of children to work, see indicatively Manfred Liebel, Philip Meade, and Iven Saadi, 'Working children as subjects of rights: Explaining children's right to work', in Martin D. Ruck, Michele Peterson-Badali, and Michael Freeman (eds), *Handbook of Children's Rights: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), pp. 437–53 (p. 448); Michael F. C. Bourdillon, Ben White, and William E. Myers, 'Re-assessing minimum age standards for children's work', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 29:3/4 (2009), pp. 106–17.

about capacity, resources and political will to address conditions of impoverishment; or of what some frame as the 'cultural imposition' of Eurocentric ideals of protected childhood. Some combine both arguments.¹¹

In this article, we challenge such positions and show why they are highly problematic by demonstrating both their unjustifiable epistemic premises and questionable ideological commitments. Given that not *all*, but only *poor* children, are compelled to work to survive, the causes of poverty must be the point of reference of analyses aiming to meaningfully explain, and respond to, discrimination as well as deprivation of the requirements to live in dignity. Any analysis of the causes of poverty must be situated within a critical understanding of the politics of development, thus avoiding the fallacious premise of accepting poverty as the inescapable (universal!) precursor to development, or a quasi-natural characteristic of a country categorised as at a lower stage of development. Instead, we argue that poverty and development must be conceptualised in relational terms, and that such a conceptualisation fundamentally undermines the key premises of advocating for children's rights to (or at) work.¹² Perspectives that do not operate with a relational understanding of poverty and development disarticulate the primary reason why *some* children find themselves compelled to work. We emphasise that development processes have been constitutively implicated in the production of poverty and impoverishment, which push poor children to work. Where advocates in favour of children's rights to work focus on 'what poor children do', we focus on what relations of impoverishment do to poor children. Advocacy for a right of children to work from scholars working on the 'rights of children' to NGOs and lobby groups has coincided – even though undoubtedly in many cases unintentionally – with a tacit acceptance of the premises and prescriptions of neoliberal development.¹³ The case for a 'right of children to work to live' rests on ultimately unjustifiable claims about child labour as culturally contingent on the one hand, and on flawed assumptions about the politics (and political economy) of poverty and development on the other. We show that contrary to assumptions of working from critical premises, the positions advanced by advocates of the 'right for poor children to work' owe much more to Eurocentric assumptions about development, poverty, as well as suppositions about the 'origins' of human rights ideas and ideals.

The premises of 'what poor children do' reconstructed: Cultural relativism meets social constructivism in IR

Analytically, academic advocates of children's rights to (and at) work cast their arguments along two related lines that can be usefully glossed as 'pragmatic' on the one hand, and 'anti-essentialist' on the other. The pragmatic side of the argument focuses on 'dealing with children's experiences as these are found', a move that clearly invokes proclivities towards what Robert Cox framed as 'problem solving theory'.¹⁴ The anti-essentialist side of the argument supplements this pragmatic

¹¹In addition to those cited in fn.10, see also the group of about one hundred researchers and practitioners called 'Children and Work', who share a mutual consensus that paid and unpaid work of children, particularly in the context of extreme poverty is an important survival strategy and an integral part of their culture, identity, and social solidarity. They argue that 'All actors should recognize and support children's systematic participation in determining their own best interest, and advancing their human rights generally. In particular, working children are workers and should have all the rights of workers, including the right to defend their interests.' See also 'Children and Work', available at: {<https://www.childrenand-work.net/members/>} accessed 8 January 2022.

¹²On relational analysis in 'development', see indicatively Dia Da Costa and Phillip McMichael, 'The poverty of the global order', *Globalizations*, 4:4 (2007), pp. 588–602; Phillip McMichael, 'Changing the subject of development', in Phillip McMichael (ed.), *Contesting Development: Critical Struggles for Social Change* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2010), pp. 1–14; Heloise Weber, 'When goals collide: Politics of the MDGs and the post-2015 sustainable development goals agenda', *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, 34:2 (2014), pp. 129–39.

¹³See fn. 10.

¹⁴Robert Cox, 'The crisis in world order and the challenge to international organization', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 29:2 (1994), pp. 99–113.

side with an orientation to the contingency, situatedness, and plurality of children's experiences in different parts of the world, and different social settings.¹⁵ Both orientations are enabled, though as we will argue not *predetermined*, by recent moves in the study of children and childhood in IR.¹⁶ A common theme among contributors to this literature centres on what its proponents argue is the paradoxical *importance* of conceptions of childhood and children in IR on the one hand, and the absence of any serious attention to what issues and problems this may entail on the other: For instance, Marshall Beier et al. show that children are configured in IR security frames as vulnerable, as 'subjects-to-be' or 'not-yet-subjects', as well as in other problematic ways that constitute (a) abstractions from the more rich and complex actual lived experiences of children;¹⁷ and (b) denigrations of children's agency and capacity to interact with, and shape political processes including in international and transnational contexts.¹⁸ Proponents of this literature also point to the ostensibly Eurocentric nature of idealised conceptions of childhood ('innocence'), and the problematic normative implications these may have in intercultural political constellations.¹⁹

Our argument is not concerned with these, or similar general observations; how children's 'innocence' may be construed or contested, and settling questions this raises is immaterial to our analysis. Neither does our argument preclude or diminish children's agency and/or the significance of their participation in international political processes, formal or informal. In what follows, we do not take issue with the 'critical constructivist' argument that the roles children and childhood(s) play in some analyses have been 'co-opted' to serve specific and problematic purposes, and that these can be helpfully contrasted with children's multiplicity of experiences and responses. Neither accepting this critique, nor contesting it has any consequences for the case we make, or for how we make it.

We differ markedly, though, on where proponents of this project draw conclusions that overstate their case: While it may be good research practice to *inquire* into children's agency and see whether and how this amounts to instantiations of (collective or individual?) self-empowerment or political actualisation, it is dangerous and quite wrong to assume that this is either 'generally' the case or in principle always within the 'reach' of children. We actually do not make a 'difference' between children or adults subjected to various forms of psychic, social, and political suffering as a result of relations of impoverishment or deprivation. Not all may suffer equally, but many will in ways that problematise what generalised concessions about 'agency' invoke. What we argue to be unconscionable is the premise which advocates of 'children's right to work' draw from these arguments in the service of a proposed pragmatic approach. Our concern is with the subjection of children to poverty and what this means morally and politically (in different contexts, no doubt) as well as *analytically*.²⁰ Our argument is that proposals for a 'children's right to work' consolidate and entrench relations of impoverishment and their consequences. 'Different' childhoods are thus enacted including in 'developing countries' in ways that are *not*

¹⁵Indicatively, see Afua Twum-Danso Imoh, 'Terminating childhood: Dissonance and synergy between global children's rights norms, and local discourses about the transition from childhood to adulthood in Ghana', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 41:1 (2019), pp. 160–82.

¹⁶See Beier for a recent collection bringing together many of the key contributors to the debate about reframing and revalorising children's agency and experiences, and criticising abstract, essentialised, and Eurocentric conceptions of 'childhood'. J. Marshall Beier (ed.), *Discovering Childhood in International Relations* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 1–20.

¹⁷Beier (ed.), *Discovering Childhood*, pp. 3, 7.

¹⁸Nieuwenhuys, 'From child labour'; Anna Holzscheiter, 'Affectedness, empowerment and norm contestation: Children and young people as social agents in international politics', *Third World Thematics*, 3:5–6 (2018), pp. 645–63.

¹⁹Holzscheiter, 'Affectedness', p. 645.

²⁰To be absolutely clear, we are *not indifferent* to what children subjected to conditions of impoverishment do or find themselves forced to do. This very much motivates our entire argument. However, we robustly defend the notion that children *find themselves* in these conditions as a result of the *politics and political economy of development*. Analytically, therefore, our focus is on 'what poverty does to children', rather than on 'what children make of their impoverishment'. For us, accepting the latter as the premise in order to advocate in favour of child labour is tantamount to making a case in favour of exploitation and the conditions sustaining such practices.

culturally contingent, but instead reproduced relationally through the developmentalist organisation of wealth accumulation and impoverishment. What poverty does to children and their experiences is front and centre to our argument below. We restore to the *abolitionist* frame on child labour an account of how political economic *conditions* are relational, albeit unequally so, and coerce and coax children into labour markets in order to sustain themselves. To start by taking the ‘situation as it is’, as advocates of (poor!) children’s right to work propose, is to enter into the constellation we reconstruct in an interested manner, and with detrimental implications for either seeing or addressing the forces and power relations that ‘make work necessary’ for poor children.

The broader context: Politics of development and human rights

There is plenty of sophisticated critical analysis of the integral relationship between rights, deprivation, and development.²¹ From such perspectives, rights, especially human rights, are not stacked hierarchically but are indivisible and cannot be abstracted from the political economy of development. Contra cultural relativists, these approaches draw attention to extensive and progressive *rights* developed by peoples of the Global South. These conceptions of rights have generally been advanced to protect the most vulnerable from discrimination and deprivation.²² They gained sustained exposure in the context of struggles against colonialism and the implications of colonial capitalism. Such conceptions of inclusive, non-divisible, and non-possessive human rights work from distinctively non-Eurocentric premises, practices, and spiritual/intellectual resources.²³ By contrast, mainstream perspectives in the field of ‘children’s rights’ scholarship and practice not only share a commitment to a hierarchical stacking of rights²⁴ but approach struggles against deprivation first and foremost from the perspective of a ‘rights-based lens’ (whether as ‘violation of rights’ or ‘a right to rights’). Irrespective of the merits of such approaches, they have some significant limitations especially in the context of poverty and development-induced deprivation and discrimination.²⁵ Rights-based approaches not cognisant of the non-Eurocentric approaches are incomplete without a critical understanding of the political economy and politics of development.²⁶ From this critical vantage point, the sources of

²¹Upendra Baxi, ‘Voices of suffering and the future of human rights’, in William Twining (ed.), *Human Rights, Southern Voices: Francis Deng, Abdullahi An-Na’im, Yash Ghai and Upendra Baxi* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 162–210; Gurminder K. Bhambra and Robbie Shilliam, *Silencing Human Rights: Critical Engagement with a Contested Project* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Siba N. Grovogui, ‘To the orphaned, dispossessed, and illegitimate children: Human rights beyond republican and liberal traditions’, *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, 18:1 (2011), pp. 41–63; Balakrishna Rajagopal, ‘Human rights and the Third World: Constituting the discourse of resistance’, in *International Law from Below: Development, Social Movements and Third World Resistance* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 171–232.

²²For example, see Robbie Shilliam’s discussion of the Oath of the Mande Hunters and the right to food and well-being more generally. Robbie Shilliam, *Decolonizing Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2021), pp. 14–15, 17; see also Grovogui, ‘To the orphaned, dispossessed, and illegitimate children’.

²³The Eurocentric tradition of liberal conceptions of human rights is shown to be *very* limited on such accounts; see Grovogui, ‘To the orphaned, dispossessed, and illegitimate children’, pp. 42, 44, 46.

²⁴The hierarchical stacking of rights is reflected in UN Human Rights doctrine and the distinction between civil and political rights, and economic, social, and cultural rights. The former are justiciable rights while the latter are non-justiciable and subjected to progressive realisation. For a good critique, see Grovogui, ‘To the orphaned, dispossessed, and illegitimate children’.

²⁵While advocacy for rights can be highly problematic as we show in relation to a case for a right of children to labour to live, in some cases ‘rights claiming’ can be a useful strategy in struggles against injustices, including discrimination and deprivation. See, for example, Juanita Elias, ‘Women workers and labour standards: The problem of “human rights”’, *Review of International Studies*, 33 (2007), pp. 45–57; Shareen Hertel, ‘Hungry for justice: Social mobilization on the right to food in India’, *Development and Change*, 46:1 (2014), pp. 72–94; Joel Modiri, ‘Law’s poverty’, *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal*, 18:2 (2015), pp. 224–73.

²⁶See the work of Upendra Baxi generally, and especially *Human Rights in a Posthuman World: Critical Essays* (India: Oxford University Press, 2007).

deprivation and discrimination become the key focus of analyses aimed at understanding struggles against injustices and impoverishment. Below, we explicate how the advocacy for child labour reflects an approach to rights which is tantamount to supporting the stance of a 'right' to be *subjected* to poverty.

We develop our analysis through a critical reconstruction of the politics of development and poverty. Our objective is to demonstrate in what ways development has often been constitutive of poverty. In particular, we demonstrate the link between politics of development, poverty, and the increases in the number of children subjected to deprivation and discrimination by revisiting the case of Bolivia. This has been a prominent reference case for advocates in favour of 'children's rights to/at work'.²⁷ Bolivia lowered the working age for child labour from 14 years to 10 years in 2014,²⁸ a decision ultimately retracted in December 2018. We show how advocates for a right of children to work to live analytically disarticulate the constitutive relations of development processes through which poverty (in Bolivia and elsewhere) has been produced and maintained. It is by way of such a disarticulation that these approaches construe poverty as inevitable (even if not as simply 'given'), and a quasi-natural characteristic of societies assumed to be positioned on a lower rung of the development ladder.²⁹ Such an understanding of development is neither apolitical nor value free, but in fact highly ideological. It is from such problematic vantage points that proposals are advanced to make children eligible to join unions, or to take out microloans in support of their working lives.³⁰ Our critical analysis brings this context of the politics of development and poverty to bear on perspectives that advocate for a right of children to work to live.

We proceed as follows. Firstly, we outline the key premises of neoliberal development and the social and political implications it has engendered. We show how neoliberal development was extended through the implementation of structural adjustment programs (SAPs). We draw specifically on Bolivia to explicate the experience of neoliberal development, and to disclose the extent of the impoverishment it engendered. This sets the framework to show how premises of Modernisation Theory as a theory of international development align with neoliberal development and how its underlying (problematic) assumptions are shared by those advocating for a right of children to work to live. Secondly, we provide an overview of the prevalence of children who labour to survive, globally and regionally. We next provide an overview of the prevalence of child labour in Bolivia, followed by a critical engagement with perspectives that advocate for child labour generally, as well as in South America before we focus on Bolivia. Our discussion includes a critique of rights based on the notion of 'norm diffusion'. In the conclusion, we return to our argument that poverty is not 'another culture' but constitutive of the dominant development process. However, this is not inevitable and there are politically efficacious alternatives that can be advanced through public policies. Our analysis works from Upendra Baxi's critical insights that approaches to rights without a critical understanding of the politics of development are not just incomplete, but highly problematic.³¹

²⁷Indicatively, see Liebel, Meade, and Saadi, 'Working children as subjects of rights', p. 448.

²⁸See: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-28360838> accessed 8 January 2022.

²⁹See Walt W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1960); Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities of Our Time* (New York, NY: The Penguin Press, 2005).

³⁰Badreddine Serrokh, *Microfinance and Street Children: Is Microfinance an Appropriate Tool to Address the Street Children Issue?* (Belgium: Free University of Brussels, 2006), available at: <https://www.streetchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/microfinance-and-street-children.pdf> accessed 8 January 2022; Manfred Liebel, 'Do children have a right to work? Working children's movements in the struggle for social justice', in Karl Hanson and Olga Nieuwenhuys (eds), *Reconceptualizing Children's Rights in International Development: Living Rights, Social Justice, Translations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 225–49; Marten van den Berge, 'Rural Child Labour in Peru: A Comparison of Child Labour in Traditional and Commercial Agriculture' (Amsterdam: International Research on Working Children, 2009), available at: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/6538/pdf/6538.pdf> accessed 8 January 2022.

³¹Upendra Baxi, *The Future of Human Rights* (India: Oxford University Press, 2002). See especially the preface for his critical outline of the link between human suffering and human rights. See also, Baxi, *Human Rights in a Posthuman World*.

Politics of development and poverty: Neoliberalism and destitution

Neoliberal development is directly associated with trends in political economy in the 1980s. There have been incisive critiques of the politics of neoliberal development, explicating both its ideological premises and how these are manifest in international institutional politics.³² During the 1980s neoliberal development was most comprehensively implemented across the Global South, primarily through the roll-out of SAPs via the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In early 1980, SAPs were initially introduced in four countries, including Bolivia.³³ The momentum picked up from there. As John Walton and David Seddon note, between 1981–2, ‘ten new countries undertook debt reschedulings, more than in the entire 15 years between 1956 and 1970’, and by 1986, 37 Structural Adjustment Loans (SALs) were in place.³⁴ SAPs entailed broad based privatisation and liberalisation of sectors, including of public sector services such as health care, education and water services, as well as the cutting of subsidies, and of welfare programmes that were in place to protect those who were most economically insecure and vulnerable. SAPs also became known as austerity programs or ‘shock treatments’ because of their harsh, immediate, and long-term socioeconomically impoverishing effects.³⁵ Impoverishment and suffering caused by SAPs sparked widespread protests across the Global South, and also in the Global North.

If popular protests, including food riots, were one key indicator of the impoverishing effects of SAPs, another has been the rise of ‘slum dwellings’. As Mike Davis has noted,

The 1980s – when the IMF and the World Bank used the leverage of debt to restructure the economies of most of the Third World – are the years when slums became an implacable future not just for poor rural migrants, but also for millions of traditional urbanites displaced or immiserated by the violence of ‘adjustment’.³⁶

As Davis shows, SAPs were directly related to stark increases in impoverishment of families and communities across the Global South. Children of impoverished families were taken out of schools and often forced to scavenge.³⁷ Poverty and suffering of poor children did not originate with SAPs but SAPs directly increased the poverty of families, and with this the number of children subjected to destitution.³⁸ Bolivia was no exception, and its centrality in ‘experiments’ with austerity politics makes it a good example of the link between SAPs, poverty, and child labour.³⁹

³²See Stephen Gill, ‘Globalisation, market civilisation and disciplinary neoliberalism’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 24:3 (1995), pp. 399–423; Julian Saurin, ‘Globalization, poverty, and the promise of modernity’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 25:3 (1996), pp. 657–80.

³³The others were Kenya, the Philippines, and Turkey. See John Walton and David Seddon, *Free Market and Food Riots: The Politics of Global Adjustment* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1994), p. 17.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 41.

³⁶Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London, UK: Verso, 2007), p. 152.

³⁷See *ibid.*, esp. pp. 151–73.

³⁸Maggie Black, ‘The year of the child’, in *The Children and the Nations* (New York, NY: United Nations Children’s Fund, International Child Development Centre, 1986), pp. 353–77.

³⁹A study on poverty in Bolivia suggests that the number of people living in poverty (conceptualised as Unmet Basic Needs) increased from 3.9 to 5.9 million between 1976 and 2003. This mostly reflects the increase of poor people in cities from 1.4 to 3.4 million during the same period. Greg O’Hare and Sara Rivas, ‘Changing poverty distribution in Bolivia: The role of rural-urban migration and urban services’, *Geo Journal*, 68:4 (2007), p. 314. In Bolivia, an estimated 34.5 per cent of people live in poverty. World Bank, ‘Childhood Poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean’, p. 3, available at: {<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/556441468196194868/Childhood-poverty-in-Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean>} accessed 8 January 2022. According to Save the Children, one in 37 children die before their fifth birthday, 16 per cent have stunted growth, and 13 per cent are out of school. See: {<https://www.savethechildren.org/us/where-we-work/bolivia>} accessed 8 January 2022. In the years preceding the SAPs, urban unemployment rose from 7.5 per cent in 1980 to 12.1 per cent in 1983 and 19 per cent in 1987. Underemployment in 1985 reached 74.1 per cent, living standards dropped, and infant mortality rate rose to 168 per thousand live births. Sixty per cent of all Bolivians earned or cultivated too little to provide

While neoliberalism is a capitalist ideology of development, it aligns ideologically with the dominant theory of *international* development, Modernisation Theory (MT). MT is a theory of capitalist development that explains inequality as a corollary of the international conceived in terms of a logic of stages rather than through a critical historical relational analytic. MT construes individual countries as located discretely at different stages, with those at lower ones compelled to ‘catch up’ with those at the top (measured in terms of GDP). This theoretical framework excludes any consideration that conditions of *international* inequality may have to do with legacies of historical as well as contemporary *relations* of domination and exploitation. MT’s conception of development informs arguments of advocates for a right of children to work to survive. These perspectives accept poverty (and impoverishment) as the discrete feature of ‘another culture’ that has *yet* to develop. Poverty is conceptualised (at least for analytical purposes) as an ‘originating’ condition. With this logic, poverty and inequality are rendered as conceptually dissociated from, and ‘prior to’ development. Our outline above of the consequences of neoliberal development, and the social suffering it has entailed, shows such assumptions to be deeply misconstrued. Against this backdrop, we now turn to examine the extent of children subjected to impoverishment globally, and in Bolivia specifically.

Poverty and child labour: The scale of the problem globally, and in Bolivia

The global statistics we present here come with the caveat that the figures vary, especially due to the absence of up-to-date information from national surveys that form a basis of the ILO’s global child labour estimates.⁴⁰ Moreover, there is a serious problem of underestimation of child labour in official surveys attributable partly to the intermittent nature of children’s work and definitions used.⁴¹ States may also be reluctant to provide a true picture of the extent of the prevalence of child labour to circumvent domestic and global pressure.

Out of an estimated total 160 million children between the ages of five and seventeen in child labour at the start of 2020, 79 million were deemed to be undertaking hazardous labour.⁴² A pervasive issue in countries of the Global South including in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, child labour is projected to increase by 8.9 million by the end of 2022.⁴³ In absolute terms, 10.7 million children in the Americas are in child labour out of which 5.5 million are in agriculture including commercial farming and livestock herding, 3.8 million are in the ‘services’ sector, and 1.4 million are in industry.⁴⁴

According to the 2016 child labour survey conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (INE), 393,000 out of 3 million Bolivian children were subjected to child labour.⁴⁵ That the 2016 survey results reveal a decline of around 50 per cent in the number of children subjected to labour compared to the 2008 figure of 800,000 requires critical scrutiny: Bolivia reduced the *legal* age limit for child labour from 14 to 10 (with some conditions), so it is likely that those

nutritional needs for their families. By 1987, half of Bolivian children, that accounted for 40 per cent of the population, were malnourished, and over 60 per cent of all school children suffered from goitre. Jennifer L. Bailey and Torbjørn L. Knutsen, ‘Surgery without anaesthesia: Bolivia’s response to economic chaos’, *The World Today*, 43:3 (1987), pp 47–51 (p. 48).

⁴⁰According to the ILO’s statistics, 10.5 million children were subjected to child labour in the Latin America region by 2018. ILO, ‘Technical Nota ECLAC-ILO’, available at: {https://www.ilo.org/americas/sala-de-prensa/WCMS_747672/lang-en/index.htm} accessed 8 January 2022.

⁴¹See also Deborah Levison, Jasper Hoek, David Lam, and Suzanne Duryea, ‘Intermittent child employment and its implications for estimates of child labour’, *International Labour Review*, 146:3–4 (2007), pp. 217–51.

⁴²Susan Gunn, Halshka Graczyk, and Martha Samano, ‘Towards the Urgent Elimination of Hazardous Child Labour’ (International Labour Organization, 2018), p. 5, available at: {https://www.ilo.org/ipcc/Informationresources/WCMS_IPEC_PUB_30315/lang-de/index.htm} accessed 8 January 2022.

⁴³ILO, ‘Child Labour’, p. 9.

⁴⁴ILO, ‘2017 Global Estimates of Modern Slavery and Child Labour’, pp. 2–3, available at: {https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_597871.pdf} accessed 8 January August 2022.

⁴⁵INE, ‘El Trabajo Infantil De Las Niñas, Niños Y Adolescentes Se Reduce’ (2018), available at: {<https://www.ine.gob.bo/index.php/el-trabajo-infantil-de-las-ninas-ninos-y-adolescentes-se-reduce/>} accessed 8 January 2022.

children (between 10–14) were excluded from the survey. Thus, the 2016 survey likely represents a figure reflecting the lowered legal age limit for child labour in Bolivia rather than the internationally recognised minimum age, thereby significantly skewing the actual number of children subjected to child labour. Bolivia is among the countries in Latin America with the highest prevalence of children subjected to child labour. Around half of these children are of indigenous origin and many of them are involved in hazardous forms of work.⁴⁶ It is also worth noting that the INE 2016 estimates are based on its distinction between child ‘labour’ that is considered harmful for children’s well-being and ‘work’ that is categorised as fulfilling the functions of learning and socialisation.⁴⁷ Refusing to accept this distinction, UNICEF draws on the same survey estimates to argue that 739,000 children and adolescents were subjected to child labour in Bolivia.⁴⁸ The issues of under-reporting of child labour in informal sectors of the economy prevail, including with regard to plantations and informal mining, street work, and in commercial sex.⁴⁹

Contesting the case for a right for children to labour to live: A critical engagement

Evidently, child labour is a condition primarily prevalent in the Global South because of the high incidence of poverty and vulnerabilities. While there is broader consensus that *poverty* causes child labour,⁵⁰ analysts too often do not focus on the causes of poverty, but instead on individual children and their families in specific sociocultural and economic settings. Thus, debates around child labour, and for or against the rights of ‘working children’ pivot around juxtapositions of universal and cultural relativist premises. Those operating from universalist premises maintain that child labour is a violation of children’s rights and support its abolition.⁵¹ Accordingly, the legal instruments of the key UN-agencies concerned with children’s rights, such as the UNCRC, and the relevant chapters of the ILO, reflect the strong universalist stance. The ILO, for instance, has more recently reiterated its position that ‘child labour is a violation of the rights of children who undertake hazardous work’.⁵² Universalist policies directed at the eradication of child labour therefore have strong momentum behind them, with legal implications at international and, via ratification, at national levels (with states of the Global South having committed to these). Contemporary rights-based anti-child labour movements have also made the case for the need to provide welfare support systems to poor children in support of achieving the universal intent.⁵³ These include financial assistance to the families of children who work (so that children would not have to work) and the provision of quality education and nutritious food.

However, the universalist stance rarely *explicitly* engages with the root causes of poverty, which would comprise a critical examination of the politics and political economy of development.⁵⁴ Cultural relativists share this lack of understanding and engagement with (a critical examination

⁴⁶European Commission, ‘EU Special Incentive’; ILO, ‘Modelo de Identificación del Riesgo de Trabajo Infantil: Metodología para diseñar estrategias preventivas a nivel local’ (2018), available at: {https://www.iniciativa2025alc.org/sites/default/files/modelo-de-identificacion-del-riesgo-de-trabajo-infantil_IR.pdf} accessed 8 January 2022.

⁴⁷INE, ‘El Trabajo’.

⁴⁸UNICEF, ‘Country Office Annual Report 2019, Bolivia’ (2019), available at: {<https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Bolivia-2019-COAR.pdf>} accessed 8 January 2022.

⁴⁹European Commission, ‘EU Special Incentive’, pp. 13–14.

⁵⁰Kaushik Basu and Zafiris Tzannatos, ‘The global child labor problem: What do we know and what can we do?’, *World Bank Economic Review*, 17:2 (2003), pp. 147–73; Kaushik Basu and Homa Zarghamee, ‘Is product boycott a good idea for controlling child labor? A theoretical investigation’, *Journal of Development Economics*, 88 (2009), pp. 217–20; UNICEF, ‘Situation of Children in Peru: Executive Summary’ (Lima, Peru, 2008), p. 14.

⁵¹Franziska Humbert, *The Challenge of Child Labour in International Law* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Peter Donnelly and Leanne Petherick, ‘Workers’ playtime? Child labour at the extremes of the sporting spectrum’, *Sports in Society*, 7:3 (2004), pp. 301–21; UNICEF, ‘Child Labour’ (2014).

⁵²Gunn, Graczyk, and Samano, ‘Towards the Urgent Elimination of Hazardous Child Labour’, p. iv.

⁵³Global March’, European Commission (EC), ‘EU Special Incentive’.

⁵⁴Exceptions not withstanding: Indicatively, see Jude L. Fernando, ‘Children’s rights: Beyond the impasse’, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 575 (2001), pp. 8–24.

of) the political economy of development. They see the universal principle of the proscription of child labour and its implications, such as resource redistribution, as problematic impositions by the North on the South. For cultural relativists, the universalist agenda is misguided and premised upon ill-informed conjectures about the sociocultural and economic realities of the lives of working children in developing countries. We turn to a closer examination of these premises.

Two broad inter-related themes can be identified in the culturalist relativist critique of the universalist defence of children's well-being and global anti-child labour campaigning efforts: (1) children's involvement in 'work' is claimed to be an integral part of culture(s) of non-Western societies where values associated with childhood are alleged to be different from the West;⁵⁵ and (2) countries in the Global South are assumed to be limited in their capacity to provide welfare, especially in the context of neoliberal development.⁵⁶ Under (1) we can include accounts that criticise Western liberal norms (with their universalising presumptions) of 'childhood as, perforce, a time of innocence, vulnerability, and incapacity'.⁵⁷ Following Vanessa Pupavac, Katrina Lee-Koo suggests the universalisation of Western conception of childhood – through, for example, international legal instruments such as the UNCRC – has negatively affected 'other ways of practicing childhood'. While it has not completely displaced other concepts of childhood, the Western ideal is argued to have become a yardstick against which to judge childhood experiences in non-Western societies. Consequently, children who do not spend their lives according to the ideal conception of childhood are seen as aberrations and 'their childhoods marked as abnormal or immoral'.⁵⁸

Against the backdrop of such arguments, restricting children's involvement in remunerative work in regulated sectors of the economy is claimed to be premised upon a problematic ideology of Western liberal childhood and deemed ineffective in the context of high prevalence of child labour. From these perspectives, attempts to abolish – or to legislate against – child labour would hence only have the unintentional consequence of forcing children to find employment in far more hazardous conditions and occupations in the 'informal' economy.⁵⁹ This stance amounts to what we explained above as accepting the inevitability of neoliberal development, and serves as the backdrop to justifying 'regulated' child labour.⁶⁰ The argument thus dovetails with rather than contradicts justifications of child labour on the basis of culture and developmental stages.⁶¹

On such accounts, a specific conception of childhood – understood as a distinct and protected phase of individual human development – is assumed to have evolved in Western Europe and North America during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – an era known for an

⁵⁵See also Michael F. C. Bourdillon, Ben White, and William E. Myers, *Rights and Wrongs of Children's Work* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009); Manfred Liebel, *A Will of their Own: Cross-cultural Perspectives on Working Children* (London, UK: Zed Books Ltd, 2004); Kate Swanson, *Begging as a Path to Progress: Indigenous Women and Children and the Struggle for Ecuador's Urban Spaces* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010).

⁵⁶See Jo Boyden, 'Childhood and the policy makers: A comparative perspective on the globalization of childhood', in A. James and A. Prout (eds), *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, Vol. 2 (London, UK and Washington, DC: Falmer Press, 2005); Olga Nieuwenhuys, 'By the sweat of their brow?' Street children, NGOs and children's rights in Addis Ababa', *Africa*, 71:4 (2001), pp. 539–57; Vanessa Pupavac, 'Misanthropy without borders: The international children's rights regime', *Disasters*, 25:2 (2001), pp. 95–112; Vanessa Pupavac, 'Children's human rights advocacy', in M. Goodhart (ed.), *Human Rights: Politics and Practice* (1st edn, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 291–310.

⁵⁷Beier (ed.), *Discovering Childhood*, p. 4.

⁵⁸Katrina Lee-Koo, 'Decolonizing childhood in International Relations', in Beier (ed.), *Discovering Childhood in International Relations*, pp. 21–40 (p. 27).

⁵⁹Tom O'Neill, 'Anti child labour rhetoric, child protection and young carpet weavers in Kathmandu, Nepal', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 6:4 (2010), pp. 413–31.

⁶⁰Liebel, Meade, and Saadi, 'Working children as subjects of rights; Swanson, *Begging as a Path*.

⁶¹Heather Montgomery, 'Are child prostitutes child workers? A case study', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 29:3/4 (2009), pp. 130–40.

unprecedented increase in pauperisation and child labour.⁶² In explanations about the decline of child labour in Europe, a number of interrelated factors are considered: the ‘advancement of science and technology’;⁶³ the efforts of ‘middle class’ reformers in raising the consciousness of common people against social injustice; the effects of labour unions and the formulation of labour protection laws; and the gradual advance of universal welfare services including schooling and health care.⁶⁴ While some attribute equal importance to technological advancement and statutory factors in the decline of child labour, modernisation through industrialisation is considered to be the most crucial factor in increasing the demand for child labour at first, but also ultimately leading to its decline.⁶⁵ *This stadial narrative of development forms a bedrock of critics of the universalists stance that all children should be protected and that child labour should be abolished.* It is premised on a highly problematic ahistorical and non-relational conception of development.⁶⁶

A critical counter analysis reveals that framing development in terms of the ladder metaphor serves to justify poverty and inequality as (necessary) stages of economic growth.⁶⁷ When viewed through a stages of growth lens, a high prevalence of child labour in developing countries is assumed to be unavoidable given *their* present ‘stage’ of development.⁶⁸ What is highly problematic here is the *acceptance* that development is contingent on poverty. Such a normative stance underpins Jeffrey D. Sachs’s justification of inequality when he makes the disturbing assertion that ‘sweatshops are the first rung on the ladder out of extreme poverty.’⁶⁹ When viewed critically, such perspectives rest on the assumption that poverty is a condition prior and external to relations of development. Consequently, it serves to justify child labour as a culturally contingent ‘fact’, and a necessary condition ‘prior to’ development.

The cultural relativist literature bears this out. For example, Pupavac contends that material advancement is a necessary precondition for the eventual convergence of diverse childhood norms (focusing on global demands for abolishing corporal punishment and child labour).

Effectively, global children’s rights advocacy aims to globalize post-industrial professional norms of childhood discipline onto non-industrial conditions. But discipline norms are part of a totality of social relations. Traditional farming necessitates children disciplined to labour because household survival depends on everybody, including children, fulfilling their allotted responsibilities. The tough conditions of traditional agriculture are a hard physical discipline over both adults and children and its high stakes make for tough discipline norms.⁷⁰

⁶²Jane Humphries, *Starting Work* in *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 172–209; Hugh D. Hindman, *Child Labor: An American History* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002); Hugh Cunningham and Pier Paolo Viazzo, ‘Some issues in the historical study of child labour’, in Hugh Cunningham and Pier Paolo Viazzo (eds), *Child Labour in Historical Perspective, 1800–1985: Case Studies from Europe, Japan and Colombia* Florence (Italy: United Nations Children’s Fund International Child Development Center, 1996).

⁶³Paula S. Fass, ‘A historical context for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child’, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 633 (2011), pp. 17–29 (pp. 19–20); Harry Hendrick, ‘The evolution of childhood in Western Europe c. 1400–c.1750’, in Qvortrup, Corsaro, and Honig (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*, p. 109.

⁶⁴Humphries, *Starting Work*, p. 208.

⁶⁵Hendrick, ‘The evolution of childhood’, p. 109.

⁶⁶For a critique of the stadial framing of development, see indicatively, Da Costa and McMichael, ‘Poverty of the global’; McMichael, ‘Changing the subject of development’; Weber, ‘When goals collide’; Heloise Weber (ed.), *The Politics of Development: A Survey* (London, UK: Routledge, 2014); Shilliam, *Decolonising Politics*.

⁶⁷See Phillip McMichael and Heloise Weber, *Development and Social Change* (7th edn, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington, DC: SAGE, 2021), esp. ch. 1; Weber, ‘When goals collide’; Heloise Weber, ‘Reproducing inequalities through development: The MDGs and the politics of method’, *Globalizations*, 12:4 (2015), pp. 660–76 (p. 671).

⁶⁸See also John Gillis, ‘Transitions to modernity’, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies* (Basingstoke, UK and New York, NY: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2009), p. 124; O’Neill, ‘Anti child labour rhetoric’, p. 415; Pupavac, ‘Children’s human rights’, p. 230.

⁶⁹Sachs, *End of Poverty*, p. 11.

⁷⁰Vanessa Pupavac, ‘Punishing childhoods: Contradictions in children’s rights and global governance’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 5:3 (2011), pp. 285–312 (p. 305). See also, Pupavac, ‘Misanthropy without borders’, p. 102.

A similar perspective is shared by Olga Nieuwenhuys who argues that gendered social norms and persistent child labour are constitutive elements of ‘underdeveloped traditional societies’.

The crucial aspect of underdevelopment ... is the unequal exchange realized in the market between goods produced in capitalist firms, where labour is valued according to its exchange value, and goods produced by the peasantry and the urban informal sector, where the use value of labour predominates. The latter group is paid only a fraction of its real cost because households are able to survive by pooling incomes from a variety of sources, undertaking subsistence activities and using the work of women and children to save on the costs of reproduction.⁷¹

The premise that the concept of work-free childhood underpinning the ILO and UNCRC is a Western-centric construct of modernity forms the problematic basis of the claim that child labour is an integral practice in non-Western cultures. It is profoundly contradicted by *the fact that child labour is tied exclusively to poverty and this ought to raise critical questions about why some children are exploited and not all*. As already indicated above, the assumption about the origin of rights or human rights sensibilities as belonging to the West, is a misconception.⁷² The cultural relativist stance that maintains that there is a divergence between global and local norms of ideal childhood in relation to the stages of ‘modernity’ or modern development relies on a problematic understanding of culture, rights, and relations of development. Similar justifications of child labour disarticulated from relations of poverty and development are premised on the assumption that ‘work’ conducted by *extremely impoverished* children for survival related purposes is based on their *free choice* rather than on deprivation and compulsion.⁷³ Leaving aside the ethical implications of such arguments, analytically they are problematic as they fail to account for the fact that poor families are compelled by poverty to send their children to work.⁷⁴

Notably, UNICEF and the ILO have both responded to the universal and cultural relativists premises. Both have made a convincing case that a sole emphasis on anti-child labour legislation is insufficient and must be complemented by social welfare provisions and financial assistance programmes – or what is regarded as a ‘holistic rights-based approach’.⁷⁵ However, this has not received any sustained attention by those advocating legislation against child labour, nor by cultural relativists.

Instead, cultural relativists point to ‘children’s activism to work’ as evidence of a struggle against what are framed as neocolonial tendencies in universalist proscriptions against child labour. As noted above, this disregards that other cultures have always had sensibilities and values associated with notions of rights and justice,⁷⁶ as well as the contributions anti-colonial struggles made towards the evolution of human rights practices.⁷⁷ The misconception that only technologically advanced developed countries could afford the luxury of providing for universal public welfare services including education and health care does not stand up to empirical scrutiny.⁷⁸

⁷¹Olga Nieuwenhuys, ‘The paradox of child labor and anthropology’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 25 (1996), pp. 237–51 (p. 243).

⁷²See, for example, Grovogui, ‘To the orphaned dispossessed, and illegitimate children’.

⁷³Liebel, *A Will of Their Own*; Swanson, *Begging as a Path*.

⁷⁴Da Costa and McMichael, ‘Poverty of the global’. See especially p. 598.

⁷⁵See also Rachel Hodgkin and Peter Newell, ‘Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child’ (UNICEF, 2007), available at: {<https://www.refworld.org/docid/585150624.html>} accessed 8 January 2022.

⁷⁶See Grovogui, ‘To the orphaned dispossessed, and illegitimate children’.

⁷⁷See the argument by Reus-Smit that individual rights must not be confined to the in/effectiveness of the contemporary human rights regime. Christian Reus-Smit, *Individual Rights and the Making of the International System* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁷⁸Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), esp. pp. 40–1. We are on board with critiques of Sen’s broader liberal conception of development such as Robbie Shilliam’s ‘Redemption from development: Amartya Sen, Rastafari and promises of freedom’, *Postcolonial Studies*, 15:3 (2012), pp. 331–50.

Amartya Sen demonstrates through examples of Sri Lanka, pre-1979 China, and Costa Rica, how 'low economic growth' countries have successfully provided social services that serve to reduce mortality rates and enhance the quality of life.⁷⁹ As Sen notes 'a country need not wait until it is much richer – through what may be a long period of economic growth – before embarking on rapid expansion of basic education and health care. The quality of life can be vastly raised, despite low incomes, through an adequate program of social services.'⁸⁰ Accordingly, it is simply wrong and politically limiting to assume that it is unfeasible to abolish child labour and ensure that families are not subjected to poverty. Advocacy of children's rights conceived in relativist terms has gone as far as to call for a 'reconceptualising' of the rights of poor working children in a way that would allow children a role as breadwinners for themselves and their families. This includes facilitating the conditions for them to 'participate' in the global capitalist economy through, for instance, microcredit schemes.⁸¹ Again, such perspective deny that it is *participation* in the neoliberal variant of the capitalist economy that has produced impoverishment of poor families and their children.

The Latin American context where demands have been consistently put forward for the regulation and legalisation of child labour is instructive, and of special significance is the case of Bolivia, which became the first country to legalise child labour for children as young as ten years old, in contravention to the ILO's Conventions 138 and 182 (Bolivia did retract this legislation in December 2018 following a Constitutional Court ruling in July 2017 against Article 129 (II) of the the Code of Girls, Boys and Adolescents of 2014).⁸²

Interests behind poverty and the justification of child labour: The case of Bolivia

Since the neoliberal economic 'reforms' initiated especially in the 1980s in most of the South American countries, including in Bolivia, the involvement of poor children engaged in work under hazardous conditions in formal and informal sectors has remained a pressing concern.⁸³ Bolivia responded to the issue by passing a highly controversial and very problematic law called the 'Code of Girls, Boys and Adolescents' (*Código Niña, Niño Y Adolescente*) of 17 July 2014 (Law No. 548), effectively 'legalising' child labour. Article 129 (I) sets the general minimum age of work to fourteen in accordance with Convention 138 of the ILO. However, in accordance with 'exceptions' specified in Article 129 (II), children as young as ten years old were permitted to work if they were self-employed (for example, as street vendors), and those from the age of twelve could have been employed by a third party provided that the work was deemed safe, did not compromise their formal education, and was based on the consent of the children and their parents or guardians.⁸⁴ As Rubén Darío Chambi Mayta critically notes, the work of indigenous children for their families and communities is framed as 'formative' and primarily beneficial for their development.⁸⁵ This, of course, not only disarticulates the links between development and impoverishment, but also denies colonial violence on indigenous communities.

Importantly, the lowering of the minimum age for work was directly in response to the impoverishment that neoliberal development had engendered, which reflected in a significant rise in the number of impoverished families and their children. The legalisation of child labour in Bolivia was heavily criticised by the international community and activists advocating for rights-based protection. Local NGOs in Bolivia including, for instance, Gregoria Apaza, Centro de

⁷⁹Sen, *Development as Freedom*, p. 45.

⁸⁰Ibid., pp. pp. 48–9.

⁸¹See, for example, Berge, 'Rural Child Labour in Peru', p. 41.

⁸²European Commission, 'EU Special Incentive', pp. 2, 13.

⁸³G. K. Lieten, 'Introduction: The worst forms of child labour in Latin America', in G. K. Lieten (ed.), *Hazardous Child Labour in Latin America* (London, UK and New York, NY: Springer, 2011), pp. 1–20 (p. 1).

⁸⁴As indicated, these 'exceptions' were reverted in 2018. European Commission, 'EU Special Incentive', p. 13.

⁸⁵Rubén Darío Chambi Mayta, 'Vivir bien, child labor, and indigenous rights in Bolivia', *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 12:2 (2017), pp. 95–112.

Multiservicios Educativos, and Fundación Desarrollo y Autogestión (CEPA) support the ILO's position on child labour.⁸⁶ Gregoria Apaza has taken the idea further by linking the anti-child labour movement with the ideology of *Vivir Bien* (*Living Well*), a distinctively indigenous outlook and philosophy that is enshrined in the Bolivian constitution.⁸⁷ As noted above, Bolivia in an ILO session of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations confirmed that the Constitutional Court of the Plurinational State through its Constitutional Decision of 0025/2017 of 21 July 2017 has declared Article 129 (II) of the Code of Girls, Boys and Adolescents (2014) to be unconstitutional.⁸⁸ Despite this reversal, it is instructive to understand the reasoning behind its lowering of the legal age of child labour, including the role of powerful lobby groups to lower the legal age for child labour in 2014. For example, Lorenza B. Fontana and Jean Grugel state,

It would be wrong to assume that the NATs are an entirely local phenomenon. In fact, they draw on considerable international alliances from groups that include STC, DCI, Terre des Hommes, and World Vision. Some of these NGOs share the NATs' idea that children's right to work is a human right and argue that children above a certain age should be free to make decisions while others take a view that accepting child labor exists means regulation and labor protection. ... Terre des Hommes Switzerland views child labor in Bolivia as a 'cultural' issue, above all, and works from an assumption that it is a matter of 'justice' to listen to how young people want to live their lives.⁸⁹

Bolivia has remained in general committed to the underlying position of the global anti-child labour movement according to which child labour should be banned and progressively eliminated. However, this position has met with considerable resistance especially from those who support children's engagement in paid employment.⁹⁰ The question of whether child labour needs to be eradicated or legalised has been framed as the contradiction between the 'norms' of childhood at the international and the domestic levels. Fontana and Grugel argue that this tension needs to be resolved through finding a 'middle' ground between the two extreme positions of abolitionist and the legalisation of child labour as in the case of Bolivia.⁹¹ It is unclear to us what a middle ground would mean and through what analysis it could be defended. A relational understanding of development and poverty avoids the fallacious positions advanced in terms of 'pragmatism' or what are framed as 'realities of developing countries'.

For example, supporters of the legalisation of child labour consider their stance to be more pragmatic, aligned with the 'realities' of developing countries and Bolivia in this particular case. Consider, for instance, the following statement:

The law [Bolivia Code of Girls, Boys and Adolescents] is an attempt to bridge the span between the ILO Conventions on child labour and the fact that the work of hundreds of thousands of children in various forms and contexts is a Bolivian reality.⁹²

Framing child labour as a 'Bolivian reality' rests on a conception of poverty as an 'originating' condition disregarding the production of impoverishment through the politics of development.

⁸⁶See also Lorenza B. Fontana and Jean Grugel, 'To eradicate or to legalize? Child labor debates and ILO Convention 182 in Bolivia', *Global Governance*, 21 (2015), pp. 61–78 (p. 69).

⁸⁷Fontana and Grugel, 'To eradicate or to legalize?'.

⁸⁸These updates are available at: {https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:13100:0::NO::P13100_COMMENT_ID:3953291} accessed 8 January 2022.

⁸⁹Fontana and Grugel, 'To eradicate or to legalize?'. p. 70.

⁹⁰Ibid., pp. 63, 70 for Bolivia; and Lieten, 'Introduction', for Latin America more broadly.

⁹¹Fontana and Grugel, 'To eradicate or to legalize?'. pp. 71–4.

⁹²Liebel, Meade, and Saadi, 'Working children as subjects of rights', p. 448.

Thus, arguments in support of child labour defended in terms of ‘a Bolivia reality’ for example, have framed and misinterpreted rights of children as expressed and conceived in the UNCRC.⁹³ The formal legal recognition in Article 12 of the UNCRC that children have the right to participate in decisions related to their well-being is considered by some to be potentially helpful in making a case for children’s involvement in paid employment. Michael F. C. Bourdillon et al. take it to mean that prohibition of children’s involvement in paid employment is a violation of their ‘right to paid employment’.⁹⁴ For them, ‘the emphasis of the Convention is on preventing harm in work rather than work as such.’⁹⁵ It is thus claimed that children who are conceptualised as autonomous actors need to be legally recognised as subjects of rights who should be free to make choices including about engagement in remunerative work including sex work, domestic labour, and other streets-based activities. For example, it is claimed that ‘girls find sex work a convenient way to earn an income and provide filial support to their families, and less degrading than outdoor agricultural work in the sun.’⁹⁶

when children are exposed to harm or hazard in the workplace, it is not always necessary, or the best available option, to remove the children from work. It is often more useful and respectful to them to focus first on the precise nature of their problems in the contexts of the children’s lives. Extra income for food might be extremely important for a child who would otherwise be malnourished, but insignificant to a child from a middle-class home.⁹⁷

As G. K. Lieten critically notes, this position, is strongly supported by ‘a powerful group of scholars’, including, for instance, Michael Bourdillon, Manfred Liebel, William Myers, Ben White, and Martin Woodhead.⁹⁸ Non-governmental organisations, including Save the Children and ‘Terre des Hommes’, demand of the ILO and governments to listen to children’s views about their work and make policies accordingly.⁹⁹ Notably, supporters of children’s rights to work including academics and practitioners from some NGOs, especially in contexts of extreme poverty, justify their position through claims that poor children themselves want to work because of monetary and non-monetary rewards.¹⁰⁰ In this context, unions of working children in Asia, Africa, and

⁹³Bourdillon, White, and Myers, *Rights and Wrongs of Children’s Work*, p. 14; Liebel, Meade, and Saadi, ‘Working children as subjects of rights’.

⁹⁴Bourdillon, White, and Myers, *Rights and Wrongs of Children’s Work*, p. 16. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 clearly states in Article 25 (2) that childhood is entitled to ‘special care and assistance’ and that ‘all children shall enjoy social protection.’ Article 23 (3) states ‘everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.’ The use of the expression ‘everyone who works’ does not imply that poor children can also work if their families are poor.

⁹⁵Bourdillon, White, and Myers, *Rights and Wrongs of Children’s Work*, p. 16.

⁹⁶Rende Taylor, Lisa, ‘Dangerous trade-offs: The behavioural ecology of child-labour and prostitution in rural northern Thailand’ *Current Anthropology* 46 (2005), pp. 411–31., cited in Bourdillon, White, and Myers, *Rights and Wrongs of Children’s Work*, p. 166.

⁹⁷Bourdillon, White, and Myers, *Rights and Wrongs of Children’s Work*, p. 174.

⁹⁸Lieten, ‘Introduction’, p. 3. See indicatively, Bourdillon, White, and Myers, ‘Re-assessing minimum age’, p. 109; Liebel, Meade, and Saadi, ‘Working children as subjects of rights’; Liebel, ‘Do children have a right to work?’; Isabel Jijon, ‘The price-less child talks back: How working children respond to global norms against child labor’, *Childhood* (2019), pp. 1–15 (p. 2). See also ‘Children and Work’, available at: {<https://www.childrenandwork.net/members/>} accessed 8 January 2022.

⁹⁹A campaign called ‘It’s Time To Talk! – Children’s Views on Child Work’ has been initiated to facilitate working children’s involvement in policymaking with support from some NGOs including, for example, Kindernothilfe, Terre des Hommes, Kindermissionswerk ‘Die Sternsinger’, Karl-Kübel-Stiftung, Kindernothilfe Austria. See Claire O’Kane, Ornella Barros, and Nicolas Meslaoui, ‘“It’s Time to Talk”: Children’s Views on Children’s Work’ (Kindernothilfe, Germany, Terre des Hommes International Federation, 2017), available at: {https://www.tdh.ch/sites/default/files/t2t_report_english.pdf} accessed 8 January 2022.

¹⁰⁰Olga Nieuwenhuys, ‘From child labour to working children’s movements’, in Qvortrup, Corsaro, and Honig (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*, pp. 289–300; Martin Woodhead, ‘Combating child labour: Listen to what the

South America, often created and run with assistance from non-governmental organisations including ‘Terre des Hommes’ and supported by some academics, have risen in profile.

Campaigns for poverty, inequality, and child labour unions: Background to the Bolivian Union of Working Children (UNATsBO) or *Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes Trabajadores* (NATs)¹⁰¹

In Bolivia, there are organisations of working children represented collectively as the Bolivian Union of Working Children (UNATsBO) or *Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes Trabajadores* (NATs), more generally.¹⁰² What is argued to be significant about NATs, for instance, is that it is run by the children themselves and ostensibly represent their general view that openly rejects the position of the ILO on child labour. Thus, ahead of the ILO’s Global Conference on Child Labour in November 2017, a conference was organised and attended by children and their supporters (including academics, practitioners of NGOs including EuropaNAT and La Paz Foundation) in La Paz, Bolivia, subsequently adopting a declaration. This declaration demanded that a space for dialogue should be opened to discuss the protection of the rights of working children independently of the ILO’s Minimum age standards. Bolivia was praised for its Code of Children and Adolescents (2014) and for prioritising the rights of working children rather than the abolishment of child labour. Thus, for adults who actively support the legalisation of children’s work irrespective of their age, this is evidence and justification of their position that children themselves *want* to work. However, no serious analytical consideration is given to the fact that the central reason for their situation given by children who work to live, is their subjection to poverty and the denial of entitlements to quality food, health care, shelter, and education, which ought to be fundamental rights.¹⁰³ *They are compelled to work to live* (in a way that middleclass children in the same context are *not*). For instance, NATs representatives consider commercial sex a *crime against children*¹⁰⁴ and demand alternatives that provide their families a guaranteed protection against poverty and exploitation. Thus, it is somewhat disingenuous of proponents of a right of children to work to live to make their case on the basis that poor children simply want the same working rights as adults.¹⁰⁵

Rather, as we have shown, children are compelled to work due to the impoverishment of their families, the latter being a consequence of development processes. Importantly, children compelled to work stress the need to address the root causes of their situations (poverty).

The buzzwords of empowerment, independence, autonomy, free choice, and dignity used by advocates of child labour resonate with neoliberal doctrines about development. Advocates completely miss the point about what compels such ‘choices’, that is, ‘what poverty does to children’. The evidence they present is substantively prefigured by the questions poor children are asked in their research and also in terms how their responses are framed and interpreted. For example, a

children say’, *Childhood*, 6:1 (1999), pp. 27–49; Liebel, *A Will of Their Own*; Swanson, *Begging as a Path*; Liebel, Meade, and Saadi, ‘Working children as subjects of rights’; Liebel, ‘Do children have a right to work?’.

¹⁰¹The first working children’s organisation, called the Young Christian Workers (YCW), was established in Peru in 1976; Patricia Isabel Sainz Prestel, ‘Changing their Lives: The Working Children’s Movement in Bolivia’ (MA thesis, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2008), p. 9. From the YCW, the Movement of Working Children and Adolescents of Christian Working Class Families (MANTHOC) was developed. The idea of ‘children’s right to work’ gained prominence in the 1990s in Latin America and other parts of the world.

¹⁰²Prestel, ‘Changing Their Lives’, p. 9. Fontana and Grugel, ‘To eradicate or to legalize?’, p. 63.

¹⁰³For example, an international meeting of working children was organised in India in 1996 by NGOs, including the Concerned for Working Children (CWC), India, African Movement of Working Children and Youth (AMWCY), West Africa, and Movement of Working Children and Adolescents from Christian Working Class Families (MANTHOC), Peru. It produced a declaration called ‘Kundapur Ten Points’. Nieuwenhuys, ‘From child labour’, p. 296. The first demand listed in the document is that children ‘want the recognition of their problems’. Another important demand was that they wanted ‘the root causes of [their] situation, primarily poverty, to be addressed and tackled’.

¹⁰⁴This example is cited in Fontana and Grugel, ‘To eradicate or to legalize?’, p. 73.

¹⁰⁵See fn. 97.

researcher in the Bolivian context asks a 13-year-old girl associated with NATs ‘how are you independent?’, to which she responds: ‘Because I work and with the money I buy my own materials and I know how to administrate my money. I have some savings that I use when I need them. For example, last year, some of the children have bought different things; I bought a bed with the money I earn by working. That’s how I become independent, I don’t depend on adults.’¹⁰⁶ Such responses are simply presented as evidence for a case in favour of child labour, abstracting from any analysis of the causes of poverty.

A central claim made in studies conducted with children subjected to labour in similar contexts¹⁰⁷ is that children reject the idea that just because of their status as children, they would be ‘more vulnerable to some kind of work than adults’.¹⁰⁸ It is assumed that exploitation experienced and reported by poor working children is due to the conditions under which they work including, for instance, ‘long working hours and lack of proper wages, training facilities and freedom of association’.¹⁰⁹ For example, a 14-year-old boy in Argentina working since the age of six states: ‘What strains me is when I have to work under bad conditions, have no rights and am exploited.’¹¹⁰ Again, responses of these poor children are interpreted by academics and practitioners as an indication that the most feasible way to improve their lives is through legalising their work. Thus, the case is made for children’s ‘right to earn money’ in recognition of their role in the national and global economy.¹¹¹

Unsurprisingly, researchers and NGOs who work as ‘collaborators’, ‘educators’, and consultants of NATs propose policy prescriptions aimed at developing ‘entrepreneurial’ and ‘financial management’ skills of poor children. Because over 70 per cent of children in Bolivia work in agriculture including on small-scale family farms in rural areas and are mostly from indigenous backgrounds, Save the Children under one of its international projects tailored a specific ‘market-based curriculum’ for them including on ‘quinoa production and processing’.¹¹² Working children have been encouraged to participate in NATs through training and awareness raising about the concepts of ‘working children’ and ‘dignified work’. According to a report by Save the Children:

Where before the rural population ... did not consider this topic as relating to their lives, they now have appropriated the concept and defend its importance. An indication of this change of heart is the fact that four of the rural, indigenous partners have supported the creation and functioning of working children’s organizations. Indigenous partners report that children participating in the program are much more outgoing, extroverted, motivated, communicative, dynamic, and active than before.¹¹³

The assumption that ‘work’ comprises a natural part of growing up in indigenous cultures and the uncritical acceptance of child labour has of course been challenged.¹¹⁴ In the context of research in Andean and Guaraní regions in Bolivia, Mayta shows how children from indigenous communities are highly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation associated with their work in agriculture in rural areas, as well as in informal economies in urban areas including street settings.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁶Prestel, ‘Changing Their Lives’, p. 36.

¹⁰⁷See, for example, the study of Woodhead, ‘Combating child labour’, pp. 32–3. An underlying assumption is that in their circumstances of poverty and lack of alternatives, poor children and their families reap many economic and social benefits from work and feel dignified. The possibility that poor children do not have to work to survive is not considered worthy of attention.

¹⁰⁸Nieuwenhuys, ‘From child labour’, p. 289.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Cited in Liebel, Meade, and Saadi, ‘Working children as subjects of rights’, p. 442.

¹¹¹Nieuwenhuys, ‘From child labour’, p. 290.

¹¹²Natalie Folz and Ashley Dawson, ‘Children Lead the Way: Final Report Summary 2011–2016’ (Save the Children), p. 13, available at: https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/14210/pdf/clw-final-summary_-_final.pdf accessed 9 January 2022.

¹¹³Folz and Dawson, ‘Children Lead the Way’, pp. 14–15.

¹¹⁴Mayta, *Vivir Bien*.

¹¹⁵Mayta, *Vivir Bien*, p. 106.

Poor children experience displacement from their communities, as they move to cities to find employment. Many of them work as domestic ‘servants’ in urban areas. These poor children have low educational attainments and high school drop-out rates in a context where they are exposed to harsh working conditions, including harmful chemicals, trafficking, and sexual abuse.¹¹⁶ In spite of such findings, the 2014 Code of Children and Adolescents (in Article 128) framed indigenous forms of child labour as ‘formative’ and part of ‘communal and family activities’.¹¹⁷ This upholds ‘idealistic views of communal labor in indigenous communities and indirectly establishes that indigenous child labor in such contexts does not carry risks’ in contradiction to the empirical evidence of high prevalence of the exploitation of children in labour.¹¹⁸ Similarly, in the context of Ecuador, for instance, Kate Swanson concludes the following with regard to the struggles and vulnerabilities of indigenous children (and women).

Given highly oppressive economic conditions created by a prolonged colonial history of racism and social exclusion, begging itself can be understood as an act of resilience. It is an entrepreneurial way for indigenous women and children to capitalize on gendered and racialized readings of their bodies.¹¹⁹

For some commentators, the regression of ‘rights’-based approaches as means of protection (which the Bolivian case implies), is indicative of problems associated with the *implementation* of international norms in domestic contexts.¹²⁰ As noted above, it is construed as an expression of competing norms, which must be settled by finding a ‘middle’ ground.¹²¹ The arguments of some cultural relativists could be seen to endorse child labour on the basis of alleged cultural contingency. We argue that these perspectives, their differences notwithstanding, crucially fail to account for one, arguably the most important point: It is *poor* children not all children who are compelled to labour to survive. The suppression of this crucial point in their accounts is enabled by false premises: Either poverty is accepted as a given, or assumed to be culturally contingent so that rights aimed at protecting all children from exploitation are framed as Eurocentric. In the case of the former, accepting poverty as a ‘given’ is due to the missing critical political economy analysis of the causes of poverty, and of how poverty is integrally connected to development processes. Such advocacy may, of course, merely be a reflection of commitments to neoliberalism, consequently accepting inequality and poverty. In the case of the second premise, it too rests on at best incomplete, and at worst a highly misleading understandings of the politics of development and poverty: Here, these rest on culturalist misunderstandings about rights and protections, and how these have been advanced in political struggles. In both cases, the upshot is tantamount to the *normalisation* of poverty.

Poverty is not ‘another culture’: Against a case for a right of children to work to live

We have advanced a critical political analysis of the relationship between development and poverty, on the one hand, and approaches that advocate for a right of (poor) children to work to live, on the other. Our argument challenges rights-based approaches to children’s well-being that implicitly or explicitly endorse child labour on the basis that (a) human rights are culturally contingent, thus endorsing a contingent right of children to work to live; and/or (b) it is an imposition to enforce obligations on states, especially those categorised as ‘developing’, to

¹¹⁶Daniela Zapata, Dante Contreras, and Diana Kruger, ‘Child labor and schooling in Bolivia: Who’s falling behind?’, *World Development*, 39:4 (2011), pp. 588–99.

¹¹⁷Mayta, *Vivir Bien*, p. 96.

¹¹⁸Mayta, *Vivir Bien*; Lieten, ‘Introduction’; Brice Lionel Batomen Kuimi et al., ‘Child labour and health: A systematic review’, *International Journal of Public Health*, 63 (2018), pp. 663–72.

¹¹⁹Swanson, *Begging as a Path*, p.91.

¹²⁰This is the position of major organisations including UNICEF, Save the Children, and the ILO. Gunn, Graczyk, and Samano, ‘Towards the Urgent Elimination of Hazardous Child Labour’; Hodgkin and Newell, ‘Implementation Handbook’.

¹²¹See also Fontana and Grugel, ‘To eradicate or to legalize?’.

guarantee social and economic provisions to poor children and their families. Both positions, we argue, are highly problematic, erroneous, and lead to unconscionable outcomes. They not only conflate suffering of modern poverty and destitution with alleged cultural predispositions but are tacitly underpinned by problematic assumptions about development based on a 'stages of growth' logic, rather than acknowledging that liberal capitalist development is realised through exploitation, deprivation, and discrimination. Child labour advocates endorse liberal and neo-liberal conceptions of development and thereby attempt to normalise poverty and a neoliberal development project, the root causes behind child labour. This stance is explicitly evident in the advocacy of some NGOs, even as poor children and their families continue to challenge their subjection to deprivation and discrimination.

Our objective has been to bring critical insights about the politics of development and rights to bear on debates about the rights of children. We have concentrated on debates that focus on *poor* children, but do not make relations of poverty an analytical point of reference. This applies to highly influential rights-oriented approaches inflected to ideas about 'norm diffusion'. As we noted following Upendra Baxi, any meaningful analysis or engagement of rights must be situated in contexts of accounts of social power and struggles for justice. Ultimately, this requires understanding 'rights' in relation to the politics and political economy of development. It also requires defending international and national instruments that uphold and protect the well-being of families and their children subjected to poverty. However, such strategies *must* be operationalised in tandem with a commitment to overcoming the root causes of the impoverishment of families and children. A crucial premise is to situate struggles against injustices within a relational historical understanding of the politics of development and poverty, as well as a critical understanding of the politics of (neo)liberal development.¹²² This requires correctives to Eurocentric assumptions about development and culture, and an appreciation of political struggles that have astutely sought to challenge the conditions of impoverishment sustained through institutional arrangements based on the cruel myth of the 'liberal reward of labor'.¹²³

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¹²²Notably, more conventional labour movement struggles for rights and protections are increasingly moving beyond direct labour-employee relations and instead creating alliances ('community unionisation') around exclusion more broadly to challenge political dynamics that sustain and reproduce injustices, including discrimination and deprivation. This is occurring both in the West and Global South. Indicatively, see Vera Weghmann, 'The making and breaking of solidarity between unwaged and waged workers in the UK', *Globalizations*, 16:4 (2019), pp. 441–56; Maria Eugenia De la O and Christian Zlolniski, 'At the crossroads: Challenges and opportunities of union organizing in the Mexico-US border', *Dialectical Anthropology*, 44 (2020), pp. 187–204.

¹²³For an excellent and invaluable discussion, see Shilliam, 'The past and present of abolition'.