



CHILDHOODS

2005 Oslo

Children and Youth in Emerging and Transforming Societies

International Conference, University of Oslo, Norway

June 29 – July 3, 2005

Call for papers

**Refractions of children's rights in development practice:
a view from anthropology**

The title of the conference refers to a world where new ethno-cultural encounters, new markets, technology and globalization shape the structure of social change, of new childhoods and the lives of children and young people. Plenary sessions will relate to this theme of change. The conference will be made up of parallel sets of sessions hosted by different thematic networks. Each set of sessions will feature individual keynote speakers, thematic paper presentations and workshops.

The sessions on *REFRACTIONS OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE: A VIEW FROM ANTHROPOLOGY* will discuss contributions from social scientists who, from an anthropological perspective, have researched the impact of the language of rights in development work on children targeted by NGOs (refugees, street children, sexually exploited children, child soldiers, working children, AIDS-orphans).

Beyond lofty intentions of protecting children worldwide against all sorts of abuse and granting them a wide range of material and immaterial rights, applying a children's rights perspective in development work has sparked intense debate. Much of this debate is about the paradox that, in spite of taking the child's best interest as the leading principle of the CRC, the children concerned have in practice disagreed with some of its core assumptions. Children's actions in, for example, participating in armed conflict; in becoming martyrs; in turning to sex work; or taking to the streets often represent conscious choices made in response to dire circumstances the complexity of which belie the CRC's core assumption that parents and the state are best equipped to share responsibility for children's protection. More generally, many of the children who are the targets of special interventions have proven to be actively and positively engaged in building a better future for them selves and their families

and they may feel humiliated if treated as minors in need of protection and expert advice.

Researchers approaching the local from an anthropological perspective have highlighted the fact that seemingly well intentioned attempts at addressing the admittedly pressing needs of children in the developing world *in abstracto*, may turn into an entirely different affair when put into practice in local contexts. Intervention by people with preconceptions of the character of a “good childhood” in accord with which they would like to shape others’ experiences can cause unintended distress and disruption. Apart from the ineffectiveness of such an approach, there is a real risk that issues confronting children may be cloaked in a discourse on rights that, in effect, both diagnoses and prescribes and, thus, eclipses alternatives that may be more sensible, more realistic and more attractive to the children concerned. There may be a real danger that in the name of their rights positive aspects of children’s lives are discarded and the alternatives, for the vast majority of them, may remain out of reach. On the other hand, there is no doubt that calling attention to children’s issues in a rights-framed approach has many advantages. The main being, no doubt, that, for the first time in modern history, children are no longer seen as appendices of their families, the state or charitable institutions. In other words, the idea that children do have opinions and engage with the underlying assumptions about their rights has paradoxically received a powerful incentive precisely because of the CRC. The promise of emancipation held out to downtrodden children and the disillusion in the face of refractory everyday practices are inescapably welded together.

We invite paper submissions for the session on *Refractions of children’s rights in development practice: a view from anthropology* that address the following topics:

1. *The stake for children in production and reproduction.* Is it entrenched or disinterred by the language of “rights” and “development”?
2. *Children’s agency and the promise of participation.* How do children in the developing world engage with the organizations and the personnel that seek to help them from a rights perspective? How do these organizations deal with the objections raised by children about the ways their rights are construed for them?
3. *Local refractions and international development.* What can anthropology contribute to the theoretical debate on children’s rights as an instrument of international development?

We welcome individual or co-authored papers. Abstracts and papers have to be presented in English. Abstracts should include the following: A statement of the purpose (preferably one sentence), summary of methods and results (presented in sufficient detail to support the conclusion) and statement of conclusions reached. Abstracts are limited to 200 words. Papers will be presented in workshops and panels.

The abstract can be registered through the conference web-site <http://childhoods2005.uio.no>. If this is a problem, abstracts can also be submitted by e-mail, marked “**Refractions of children’s rights in development practice: a view from anthropology**” to the conference secretariat childhoods@uv.uio.no or by mail (diskette) to the address below by **January 15, 2005**.

Mail address:
"Childhoods 2005"
University of Oslo
Faculty of Education
Childhoods 2005 Oslo
P.O.Box 1161, Blindern
NO-0318 Oslo, Norway

Final registration for the conference will close on March 15, 2005.
For information regarding program, registration, conference fees and other practical issues see the conference website <http://childhoods2005.uio.no>

Sincerely,

Olga Nieuwenhuys, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
Pamela Reynolds, John's Hopkins University, Baltimore, USA.
Karl Hanson, Institut Universitaire Kurt Bösch (IUKB) in Sion, Switzerland