

Abstract

The 2018 anti-Trump protest in London is dominated by an effigy, in the form of a balloon, that morphs President Donald Trump and childhood. Whilst this can be interpreted as a humorous act to ridicule Trump, a critical reading of the scene through a postmodern lens suggests that the image is an appropriation and manipulation of childhood. Trump masquerading as a baby becomes the ‘vagabond’ who is denied citizenship; she is a focus for negativity and fears, symbolising the values of hate and intolerance. The Trump Baby is vexing in the way it obscures knowledge of the agentic and competent child known within the nursery. The protesters exercise power as they mock and humiliate the Trump Baby in the protest and on social media. Such actions legitimise hostile acts against children and prompt questions about the interdependency between children and adults in the both the construction of values and the realisation of children’s citizenship. This paper considers a range of positions that adults could adopt in order to co-construct values with children and respect their status as citizens. In this way, nurseries can become forums where children’s citizenship is both defended and nurtured.

Key words:

Early childhood, values, citizenship, postmodernism, aesthetics of protest

Introduction

On 13th July 2018 a balloon depicting President Donald Trump in the guise of a baby was positioned in Parliament Square in London. The inflatable became a central image in the Anti-Trump Street protests in response to his visit to the United Kingdom. During this London centred protest the image acquired, through social media, a global status in the Anti-Trump movement. Its presence within London’s cultural heritage was secured following the decision by the Museum of London to acquire and care for the Trump Baby within its permanent collection (Moore & Langfeldt 2021). As a focal point in the protest the inflatable symbolises the Capitaloscene; understood here as the output of systems dominated by the market, profit and human exceptionalism (Harraway, 2016) and forms of oppression and exploitation (Moore, 2019). Trump is represented as the all-powerful figure. As a postmodernist I am conscious of a partial knowledge of the purpose of the Trump Baby; there are a multitude of ways of knowing

and telling the story of this effigy at the centre of the protest (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005). I am suspicious that the Trump Baby implies a truth about childhood that masks children as citizens. From this perspective the protesters appear to disparage Trump by presenting him as a difficult child whereby in practice they disparage childhood. In this paper I contest the meaning of the balloon and question the presence of the Trump Baby in the protest. By engaging in ‘dangerous writing’ (Badley, 2021, p.718) I embody moral awareness, this means revealing alternative, if troubling, readings of the Trump Baby (Yoo, 2019). It is the transposition of the figure of Trump and all that he represents, onto childhood that is vexing. In the protest the effigy of the Trump Baby embodies the values of hate, greed, authoritarianism, unfairness, injustice and anger. Values here are understood as the principles ‘that act as general guides to behaviour, the standards by which particular actions are judged to be good or desirable’ (Halstead & Taylor, 2000, p.169). However, the values of children are not visible to me as the observer. The baby is subsumed by Trump, and this unsettles my knowledge of the child. It prompts me to revisit knowledge of children as agentic citizens emerging from sites of early childhood education; such knowledge has the potential to disrupt the negative discourse about childhood surrounding the Trump Baby.

The right to public protest is not under question here; the aim of the paper is to unsettle the effigy of the Trump Baby and give visibility to the problematic consequences of the appropriation of child’s image within the protest. The paper begins with an examination of the complex implications of the inflated figure of the Trump Baby for the status children as citizens. Then follows a discussion of a range of alternative responses from adults informed by literature on values and children’s citizenship in the nursery. Within the field of early childhood, any paper must navigate the diversity of terminology used to describe provision concerned with both the education and care of young children as noted by Lloyd (2012). Here, the term *nursery* is used as a pragmatic strategy to describe places that provide both education and care for young children. Similarly, the term *practitioner* is applied when referring to people who work in nurseries. The pronoun ‘she/her’ is used when considering the child(ren); the viewing of children in the female vernacular is a deliberate strategy to bring girls to the foreground in the

knowledge of Trump as a predator of women (Badley, 2021). This is intended as morally sensitive writing (Yoo, 2019).

Why is the Trump Baby so troubling for children's citizenship?

A critical reading of the inflatable Trump Baby reveals the complex implications for children's citizenship. Viewed through the lens of the aesthetics of protest, the Trump Baby is a humorous material object that 'depicts Trump as a snarling baby in a nappy with tiny hands and moobs' (McGarry, 2018). Whilst this caricature has been critiqued as simplistic and labelled as a baby blimp (Fenner, 2018) the meaning of this material object is constructed through the performance of protest (McGarry, Ezhart, Eslen-Ziya, Jenzen and Korkhut, 2019). Here the protesters both mock Trump and create a unifying focus for a movement of geographically dispersed people opposed to President Trump. Within the moment of the protest people exercise power and share their voice by placing the Trump Baby centre stage. In this way the inflatable creates a sense of belonging for people opposed to Trump and is an invitation for others to join in (McGarry, 2019). Whilst the protesters are expressing their discontent, as sociopolitical and sociocultural actors, they have appropriated the image of baby. I suggest that Trump and the baby are inseparable within this aesthetic. In this way the child embodies the values associated with Trumps' authoritarianism including unfairness and injustice. It is the claiming of the baby for this aesthetic of protest that is problematic: the protesters exercised power through the Trump Baby in ways that diminish childhood. The protestors categorised childhood as Trump (Wyness, 2014). This is an affront to children's citizenship as understood within the discipline of childhood studies. Roche (1999) problematises the concept of children's citizenship, he argues that children are positioned by adults as 'only as a victim or a source of trouble (p.497) and that the 'concern with state-individual or state-civil society relations' (p.476) obscures the significance of adult-child relationships. By focusing on the child rights and relationships within civil society, Roche proposes 'a redrawn image of citizenship might serve to promote all our interests through it recognition of mutual needs and concerns'(p.476). This means adults respecting children as social actors as well as acknowledging the imbalance of power between adults and children and the actions needed to address imbalances; Moss (2019) emphasises that 'we cannot pretend to be free of power and to stand outside power relations'(p.106). The

Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNComRC, 1989), as an international treaty, recognises that children have civil, political and social rights. The rights within this treaty emphasise the connectivity between adults and children; as the realisation of children's rights is dependent of adults' actions. This prompts us to question the relationships between the protesters and children. Children's perspectives on the Trump Baby and all that it represents are denied - the child as citizen and social actor is obscured by the Trump Baby.

A post-modern perspective on the protest further destabilises the status of children as citizens. The Trump Baby generates a feeling of uncertainty because it obscures our understanding of the agentic child as the citizen. The child, as we understand her, is suspended until further notice. She is subsumed by Trump's nepotism, racism and misogyny. The child becomes the manufactured stranger and as such she is feared (Bauman, 1997). Yet within this complex and unstable space of protest she is simultaneously Trump and the Baby and is 'the oppressed who have been denied the sources for identity building and so (for all practical intents and purposes) also the tools of citizenship' (Bauman, 1997, p. 34). This creates a narrative of the child, within the form of Trump, who is powerless, irrational, capricious and without agency, rights or capacity. However, there is something far more sinister happening here; the effigy of the Trump Baby becomes the post-modern vagabond, the alter ego for the protesters. As an alter ego, the Trump Baby serves 'as a public exposition of the innermost private, as an inner demon to be publicly exorcized, an effigy in which all that cannot be suppressed may be burnt. The alter ego is the dark and sinister backcloth against which the purified ego may shine.' (Bauman, 1997, p.73). The caricature of the baby becomes more than a focus for negativity but, as the alter ego, she represents the protesters innermost fears. The protesters position themselves as the antithesis to the Trump Baby and their egos shine.

The process of inflating and deflating the Trump Baby takes on a new meaning within the ritual of public protest; her inflation announces the arrival of 'a rubbish bin into which all ineffable premonitions, unspoken fears, secret self-deprecation and guilts too awesome to be thought of are dumped' (Bauman, 1997, p.73). Her deflation represents the public exorcism of Trump's beliefs and value and becomes a source of comfort to the protesters.. In this way the protesters

move from claiming the image of the child to exercising power over her through both oppressive and destructive actions. She has no voice in her depiction, purpose or positioning of her own image. The protesters through their caricature of Trump in the form of a baby legitimise oppressive acts against children.

Beyond this public protest is juxtaposed the parallel world of nurseries shared by children and practitioners. It is the polarisation of these two domains that reveals the extent to which children are marginalised by the deployment of the Trump Baby within the protest. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence's (2013) vision for the early childhood institution provide insights into the ways children's citizenship might flourish. They understand early childhood institutions as 'public forums situated in civil society in which children and adults participate together in projects of social, cultural, political and economic significance' (p.78). Here the forum is a place for active citizenship by both children and adults characterised by participation, democratic practices and collective action. A project for the early childhood institution includes 'constructing a new public discourse about early childhood' (p.82) which focuses on the relationship between young children and society through democratic and emancipatory practice. Such a project has the potential to reconstruct not only the image of the child but provide opportunities for children to engage in actions of social justice. In this space the image of the child is as a 'creator of knowledge, identity, culture and values; a child that can live, learn, listen and communicate, but always in relation with others' (Moss, 2014, p.88). This stands in contrast to the image of the Trump Baby and all that it represents. Within this visionary early childhood institution, the agentic child's autonomy is nurtured through the interdependence between children and between children and adults. They are viewed as citizens and as the subject of rights (Moss, 2014). By contrast, amid the protest there is an absence of interdependence between the child and adults. This absence can be understood further through the perspective of ethics. As a postmodern observer of the protest, I am meeting the Trump Baby as the other. Guided by Bauman (1993) and Levinas (1989) I assume responsibility for the other; this changes my relationship with her. The meeting becomes an uncomfortable place, as the face of the inflatable becomes the child; knowing the child places responsibility on me to welcome her and affirm her agency and autonomy. My encounter with the other, she the child in the Trump Baby, leads me to take

responsibility for and respect her otherness (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). I become aware of how the Trump Baby others the child and subsumes her into Trump's oppression and authoritarianism. The effigy raises consciousness of Trump's policies that respond to gun violence, discrimination and climate change; such policies negatively affect young children's lives in the United States of America (Mandel, 2018).

Such an analysis reveals the sinister and troubling notions arising from the appropriation of the image of the baby by the protesters. The hostile space of public protest sits in contrast to the vision for the early childhood institution; in the former the child as social actor and citizen is denied and in the later the child is welcomed and respected as a citizen.

Discussion

In this section I introduce knowledge of values from the parallel world of the early childhood nursery in order to further disrupt the problematic discourse of the Trump baby by, firstly, foregrounding knowledge of the agentic child as an active participant in their community and, secondly, exploring the significant role of adults in enabling young children's construction of values and citizenship. In advocating for the 'sociological imagination' Mills (1959, p.232) sets out the responsibility of academics 'to shift from one perspective to another, and in the process to build up an adequate view of a total society and of its components.' Here the opportunity exists for both the author and reader to exercise imagination by considering values and the conditions that support young children citizenship. The discussion is structured by themes that give visibility to a range of potential responses by adults to the challenging implications of the Trump Baby for young children.

Values in the parallel spaces of the protest and the nursery

The spaces of public protest and the nursery reveal a polarisation of values. The effigy of the Trump Baby embodies the values that the protesters attribute to Trump and all that he represents. The Trump Baby brings to the foreground values of hate, greed, authoritarianisms, unfairness, and anger. In a vexing way, such values are embodied and communicated via the inflatable

baby; they are imposed on the child through the power of the protest. Yet empirical studies (e.g. Johansson & Einarsdottir, 2018 and Robson, 2019b) reveal a counter narrative of values in the nursery that disconnect the child from the values present in the protest. In the nursery values are central in developing understandings of citizenship; particularly the values of fairness and social justice (Osler, 2015 and UNESCO, 2015). Values are standards or criteria on which young children select and evaluate actions and events (Halstead & Taylor, 2000). They are, therefore, central to children's active participation as citizens in the nursery and the wider community. Values in the nursery are 'complex, implicit and embedded' (Johansson & Einarsdottir, 2018, p.12). This means that values are situated and influenced by all people in the nursery, including the children. Robson (2019a and 2019b) found a richness of values visible in children's daily participation in the nursery. The values empathy, solidarity, justice, respect, joy and hope were implicit in children's everyday actions in contrast to the values present in the protest. There is a diversity of values entangled in practitioners' accounts of their work with children; values are negotiated between adults and children (Puroila, Johansson, Estola, Emilson, Einarsdottir and Brostrom, 2016 and Hansen, et al., 2020). Here practitioners emphasise the values of care and democracy which respect children's competence; they focus on harmony as a disciplinary value that support positive relations between all in the nursery. Disciplinary values are concerned with the well-being of all children and adults in the nursery; this means that 'practitioners and children together reflect on situations in the everyday life of the preschool' (Jensen & Brostrom, 2018, pp.42-43) as part of a democratic practice.. In the protest adults have a legitimate right to express their abhorrence and discontent with Trump; however, the exercise of power in this context constructs negative values that are attributed to the Trump Baby. Values of hate and intolerance are enacted and validated in the performance of the protest; here the baby is mocked and is isolated.

Positioning of adults in relationships with children – learning from pedagogy in the nursery

The role of relationships in the construction of values brings to the foreground issues of power in the positioning of adults. Knowledge from empirical studies in nurseries challenges us to reimagine relationships between adults and young children; it provides insights in the complex task for adults to address power implicit in pedagogical relationships. In the nursery,

practitioners privilege democratic values and this creates opportunities for children to exercise influence (Hansen et al., 2020 and Robson, 2019b). However, this is not always straightforward, for example, Robson (2019b) found that pedagogical documentation limited children's agency as adults were prescriptive of the ways in which children communicated their ideas. In the nursery the relationships between adults and children are structured by pedagogy that supports a co-construction of values. Johansson and Einarsdottir (2018) suggest that reflection can lead to a pedagogical praxis that nurtures values. They argue that reflection on critical incidents in the nursery generates new insights on values and bridges the gap between the different value perspectives of adults and children. By foregrounding values in dialogues about practice, practitioners develop awareness of their tacit knowledge of values and it becomes a conscious level in practice (Hansen et al., 2020 and Robson, 2019b). However, a conscious awareness of values may be insufficient to address power imbalances between adults and children in the nursery. Power imbalances may be revealed, and therefore addressed, by practitioners reflecting on their epistemic beliefs about how children learn and the extent to which they position children as experts in their own lives (Lunn-Brownlee, Johansson, Cobb-Moore, Boulton-Lewis, Walker and Ailwood, 2015; Robson, 2019a and Robson 2019b). In order to reduce the risk of exercising power over children adults need to be conscious of their values and engage in reflection on the implications of their values for children.

Pedagogies in the nursery position adults and children in specific ways. Puroila et al., (2016) conceptualise a pedagogy that emphasises the 'unhurried presence' (p.33) of the practitioner. Such a pedagogy embodies caring values and relationships are characterised by dialogue between adults and children. Here the pedagogy privileges the practitioners' encounters with children, their co-presence with children and listening to children as a way of realising caring values. Such an approach prompts practitioners to know and accept the child. An alternative positioning of the adult is offered by Hawkins (2014), she theorises a pedagogy for social justice which aims to develop a critical consciousness in both adults and children to both respect and value human dignity, diversity and difference. In this pedagogy there are opportunities for both adults and children to listen, engage in shared thinking and encounter human suffering guided by the values of care and empathy. In a complex pedagogical relationship adults have a dual

responsibility to both position children as capable of making moral judgements and create opportunities for them to respond to issues of injustice. Similarly, Zachrism (2018) argues that practitioners must create conditions in the nursery to promote children's sense of belonging. Such conditions can be realised by promoting equal and respectful relationships in the nursery where human diversity and uniqueness are valued. In the shared space of the nursery adults and children construct and enact values through the pedagogical relationship. As a response to the Trump Baby adults could reflect on the complexity of their positioning in relation to children in order to respect their competency and agency in enacting values. This involves adults engaging in dialogue with children informed by values of care and empathy.

Interdependency of children and adults in children's enactment of citizenship

My reading of the Trump Baby sees the effigy as a child who is oppressed and denied the tools for citizenship; she is without agency, rights, capacity or power. The scene is dominated by destructive and negative values that further diminish the child. Values play a significant role in the development of children's understandings of citizenship. Empathy and respect as shared values can contribute to children's sense of belonging to a community and to a common humanity (Osler, 2015 and UNESCO, 2015). In this way values extend beyond the physical space of the nursery and are supportive in establishing a sense of belonging in the community. Robson (2019b), researching values education in England, found that young children's exploration of kindness led them to engage in acts of kindness in the nursery, in their families and with people they met daily in the community. Here the child is the social actor engaged in social action and guided by their values. Such actions have the potential to create connections between children and other people in the community. However, the establishment of a sense of belonging is not an individual concern for each child; it is a right and nurseries have a responsibility to create conditions that realise a sense of belonging for all children (Zachrism, 2018). In fulfilling this responsibility adults must not only reflect on their positioning in the pedagogical relationship but also how the pedagogy supports the formation of children's social relations and actions in and beyond the nursery.

Young children, as social actors, are proactive in seeking opportunities to influence policy and practice in the nursery (Robson, 2019a and 2019b). For children this is a complex process informed not only by values but also young children's consciousness of their rights.

Quennerstedt (2016) found that 'influence is a highly present rights issue for very young children'(p.12). She observed how children enact political human rights by 'taking initiatives to affect the situation,... to communicate will[and] assert will' (p.13). In this way children are right holders actively seek to realise their rights through forms of action that seek to extend their influence in the nursery. However, young children's enactments of citizenship are complex and multi-layered. Palmadottir's (2018) study found that although children challenge the values and rules introduced by practitioners to govern their play, they also exercised solidarity in conforming to the rules and guiding children who questioned the rules. Here children actively sought to influence their peers and practitioners had a significant role in supporting children to understand and resolve value conflicts.

Young children's social action includes holding adults to account for their actions. For example, Robson (2019b) found that children participated in collective action by drawing attention to adult breaches of policies to protect children with food allergies. Here children sought to influence the action of adults with a collective call for change in adult behaviour. A further way in which children exercise agency is their refusal of a pre-determined citizenship identity (Bath and Karlsson, 2016). In this study children exercised solidarity by questioning the treatment of others by adults; however, adults did not interpret this action as an expression of children's agency and an enactment of citizenship. This resulted in missed opportunities for adults to gain understanding of children's citizenship through a process of inter-generational learning (Bath and Karlsson, 2016). An alternative response for adults would be to accept that children have agency and are competent. This would mean that the ways in which children enact citizenship can be constantly reimagined by adults. Adults must be open to the ways in which children may hold them to account for their actions or seek resolution on matters of concern to them.

In the nursery values are central to pedagogical relationships and supporting children's enactments of citizenship. Adults position themselves in ways that respect children's agency and

competence. As a result, values are co-constructed, all people work together to resolve value conflicts. Knowledge of values and pedagogy in the nursery has the potential to disrupt our reading of the Trump Baby in the spectacle of the protest.

Conclusion

Throughout I have examined the parallel spaces of the public protest and the nursery; they are disconnected by the complex way in which each positions the child. In the protest, the child can be understood as the post-modern vagabond and the focus of hate for Trump. By claiming the image of the child and embodying her as Trump the protesters ritualise the degradation of childhood. It is the enactment of hate that has the potential to legitimise hostile acts against children. In the parallel world of the nursery children's citizenship may be realised through democratic practices and collective action (Dahlberg et al., 2013). In claiming the image of the child for Trump the protesters deny children any voice in how she is represented in the protest. By contrast the nursery is a place where children hold adults to account for their actions and where adults adopt value-based positions. Both have the potential to address power relations between adults and children. The effigy of the Trump Baby is vexing in the way protestors exercise power over children. The hostile space of the protest destabilises our understanding of the competent child who exercises agency in the nursery. Despite the physical deflation of the balloon after the public protest the Trump Baby is sustained through her ongoing presence on social media.

The aim of this paper is to unsettle the Trump Baby by giving visibility to knowledge of children's values and their enactments of citizenship reported in empirical research conducted in nurseries. This knowledge informs a range of positions or responses by adults that have the potential to counter the oppressive discourse surrounding the Trump Baby. Dahlberg et al.'s (2013) vision for the early childhood institution is a forum for active citizenship characterised by active participation in learning by both adults and children. Therefore, practitioners need to reflect on their position in relation to children and the ways in which this supports the

construction of values and children's enactment of citizenship. In this way, nurseries can become spaces where children's citizenship is both defended and nurtured.

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