UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

https://helda.helsinki.fi

# "Be Creative, Be Friends and Share Cultural Experiences" : Genre, Politics, and Fun at the Junior Eurovision Song Contest

**Jay, Zoe**

**2023-10-19**
Oxford University Press
http://hdl.handle.net/10138/566966
Jay, Z 2023, '"Be Creative, Be Friends and Share Cultural Experiences" : Genre, Politics, and Fun at the Junior Eurovision Song Contest', International political sociology, vol. 17, no. 4, olad019. https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olad019

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository. https://helda.helsinki.fi
This is an electronic reprint of the original article.
This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.
Please cite the original version.

*International Political Sociology* (2023) **17**, 1–18

# "Be Creative, Be Friends and Share Cultural Experiences": Genre, Politics, and Fun at the Junior Eurovision Song Contest

Zoë Jay
*University of Helsinki, Finland*

This article examines children's political agency in the context of the Junior Eurovision Song Contest. The Eurovision Song Contest is widely recognized as a political arena—a space for nation branding and soft diplomacy, narratives of European musical and democratic harmony, and protests over global political events. But despite filling similar roles to their adult counterparts, the young performers' age and the organizers' emphasis on ensuring the event is safe and fun mean these dynamics are frequently downplayed or overlooked at Junior Eurovision, with significant consequences for how we understand children's political and politicized roles in international cultural spaces. I work with Lauren Berlant's concepts of genre and the juxtapolitical to argue that recognition of children's political—as opposed to artistic—agency by adults is tempered by both the format of Eurovision as entertainment *and* by broader conceptions apparent in international discourses of children as apolitical innocents. I suggest that while each of these genres can work separately to quiet the political dimensions of events, issues, and identities, it is Junior Eurovision's double-edged status as a spectacular musical event and one starring and aimed at children that keeps the young performers from being recognized as having political identities and agency twice over.

Cet article s'intéresse au rôle politique des enfants dans le contexte du Concours Eurovision de la chanson junior. L'Eurovision pour les adultes est largement reconnu comme étant une scène politique : un espace pour la caractérisation des nations, les récits d'harmonie musicale et démocratique de l'Europe et de protestation d'événements politiques mondiaux. Néanmoins, malgré que l'Eurovision junior remplisse des fonctions similaires à son homologue adulte, le jeune âge des chanteurs et l'accent mis sur la sécurité et le caractère amusant de l'événement par les organisateurs aboutissent souvent à la minimisation et l'ignorance de ces dynamiques lors de la version junior. Celles-ci s'accompagnent de conséquences concernant notre compréhension des rôles politiques et politisés des enfants au sein des espaces culturels internationaux. Je travaille avec les concepts de genre et de juxtapolitique de Lauren Berlant pour affirmer que la reconnaissance du rôle politique, par opposition au rôle artistique, des enfants par les adultes est modérée par le format de divertissement de l'Eurovision et des conceptions plus larges, qui transparaissent dans les discours internationaux, d'innocence apolitique enfantine. Je suggère que bien que chacun de ces genres puisse fonctionner séparément pour taire la dimension politique des événements, problématiques et identités, c'est en fait le double statut de l'édition junior, un événement musical spectaculaire, qui fait jouer des enfants et leur est destiné, qui évite qu'on admette

Jay, Zoë (2023) "Be Creative, Be Friends and Share Cultural Experiences": Genre, Politics, and Fun at the Junior Eurovision Song Contest. *International Political Sociology*, https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olad019
**Corresponding author e-mail:** zoe.jay@helsinki.fi
© The Author(s) (2023). Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the International Studies Association. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted reuse, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/17/4/olad019/7323588 by Helsinki University Library user on 10 November 2023

que les jeunes chanteurs puissent avoir une identité ou un quelconque rôle politique.

Este artículo examina la acción política que ejercen los niños en el contexto del Festival de la Canción de Eurovisión Junior. El Festival de Eurovisión para adultos está ampliamente reconocido como un escenario político: un espacio para la marca de cada nación, para exponer narrativas de armonía tanto musical como democrática a nivel europeo, y para llevar a cabo protestas por eventos políticos globales. Sin embargo, y a pesar de que desempeñan roles similares a sus homólogos adultos, la edad de los jóvenes artistas y el énfasis por parte de los organizadores en garantizar que el evento sea seguro y divertido, provocan que estas dinámicas se minimicen o pasen por alto con frecuencia en el Festival de Eurovisión Junior, lo cual deriva consecuencias para la forma en que entendemos los roles, tanto políticos como politizados, que juegan los niños en los espacios culturales internacionales. Trabajamos con los conceptos de género y yuxtapolítico enunciados por Lauren Berlant con el fin de argumentar que el reconocimiento por parte de los adultos de la acción política que ejercen los niños (en oposición a la artística) se ve atenuado tanto por el formato de Eurovisión como entretenimiento como por otras concepciones más amplias que resultan aparentes en aquellos discursos internacionales que hablan de los niños como inocentes apolíticos. Sugerimos que, si bien cada uno de estos géneros puede funcionar por separado para silenciar las dimensiones políticas de los eventos, los problemas y las identidades, lo que impide que los jóvenes artistas sean reconocidos de manera doble, por tener identidades políticas y por ejercer acciones políticas, es el propio estatus doble de Eurovisión Junior que, por un lado, es un evento musical espectacular y, por otro, está protagonizado y dirigido a los niños.

## Shine Bright: Introducing the International Politics of the Junior Eurovision Song Contest

Rocking a suit of silver and fluorescent yellow—human mirror ball but make it streetwear—a girl stands on stage with her dancers in front of a projection of a rapidly melting iceberg. “Do you know what we’re fighting for?” she asks the camera as she warns that time is running out. This is Viki Gabor, twelve years old, from Poland, and the winner of the 2019 Junior Eurovision Song Contest (JESC), held in Gliwice-Silesia, Poland. Gabor’s performance is sophisticated and fun, but its message about the need to come together to save the world from climate disaster before it is too late is powerful and explicit: As she sings, a bright red timer counts down behind her.

Following the 2019 contest, the Polish national broadcaster, Telewizja Polska (TVP), stressed that the aim of the event is to create an environment for the participating children to “be creative, be friends and share cultural experiences” (TVP 2020). Each year since 2003, young performers have come together in search of a winning song—an opportunity to foster new talent, and for the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) to cultivate a loyal audience from a young age. The emphasis on friendship and creativity is central to the JESC format; the EBU and host countries downplay the competitive aspects of the event, focusing instead on ensuring the young artists feel safe and have opportunities for new experiences and to make new friends. Like its parent event, the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC), JESC is intended to be a “non-political event,” a friendly display of collaboration that (supposedly) sets political and national differences aside for the love of music (Eurovision.tv 2023).

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/17/4/olad019/7323588 by Helsinki University Library user on 10 November 2023

But Gabor's performance and others like it—the 2019 contest alone featured five different entries about the environment and climate change—are a clear indication that global political and social dynamics play out on the JESC stage regardless of the EBU's no politics rule. The adult Eurovision is now widely recognized by academics and (some) fans and artists as a space for nation branding, cultural diplomacy, expressions of cultural, linguistic, gender, and sexual identities, and protests over national, European, and global political events. Yet the young age of the performers—currently between nine and fourteen—means these dynamics are frequently downplayed or overlooked at Junior Eurovision. This downplaying occurs despite the performers filling similar roles to their adult counterparts as representatives of their countries, advocates of their own personal and political causes, and participants in an event presented as the cultural flagship for narratives about European integration and diversity.

Framing Junior Eurovision as non-political has important consequences for how we understand the role of children in international politics, from the ways their inclusion or exclusion are shaped by adult understandings of what childhood should look like, to the ways children's attempts to exercise political and creative agency intersect with the choices of adults and adult-run institutions, and with the constraints and opportunities of the international stage. For scholars of Eurovision, and of pop culture and world politics, this matters because Junior Eurovision is more than a miniature copy of the "main event." Differences in format compared to ESC alter the geopolitical contours of the event, and present alternative opportunities for nation branding and Europeanization, while the EBU's efforts to attract younger audiences secure the European project into the future by speaking to the next generation of European citizens. Where EU-funded programs such as the Erasmus exchange scheme and European Youth Parliament seek to develop generations of young Europeans well-versed in the structure and function of European institutions and privileges of free movement, Junior Eurovision encourages children and young people to see "Europe" not only as a boring, complicated bureaucracy, but also as a source of opportunity and entertainment. For scholars of children in international relations (IR), too, the event is a chance to understand how children operate and are portrayed in international spaces beyond the "high politics" of crisis and conflict, and the "everyday" politics of school and home. The binary representations of children as either innocent victims or exceptional icons that abound in studies of war, human rights, activism, and labor are also present at Junior Eurovision, but play out in different ways as children navigate the tensions inherent in being afforded a creative platform—the literal stage—but not a political one.

This article therefore explores Junior Eurovision as a site of international politics. I seek to understand the affective and structural contexts that render the event juxtapolitical: "flourishing in proximity to the political," precisely because the life-troubling adult business of politics is "elsewhere managed" by adults striving to protect childhood innocence (Berlant 2008: 3). My "archive" (Berlant 2008; Halberstam 2011) was a YouTube viewing marathon of the live Junior Eurovision shows from 2003 to 2022, supplemented with official music videos, press releases, and media interviews from the artists, broadcasters, and fan websites. I then engaged in close reading—watching and rewatching the videos to interpret their themes, symbols, and messages—to focus on two case studies: the interval act "common songs," because they are unique to the Junior Eurovision format, and songs about climate change, because they make up the bulk of the songs with explicit calls to political action. I chose the specific performances and lyrics mentioned throughout the article as examples, partly because they are broadly representative of the types of performances that appear on stage, and partly because they stood out to me as particularly catchy or emotive. This is a subjective choice for sure, but one that, in keeping with Jack Halberstam's (2011: 21) belief in "thinking little thoughts

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/17/4/olad019/7323588 by Helsinki University Library user on 10 November 2023

and sharing them widely," I think reflects the way popular music captures individual and collective imaginations simultaneously.

I build on Lauren Berlant's work on genre to argue that recognition of children's political (as opposed to artistic) agency by adults is tempered by both the format of Eurovision as entertainment *and* by broader conceptions apparent in international discourses of children as apolitical innocents. The genres of entertainment and normative childhood create and reinforce collections of norms, tropes, and feelings that structure international audiences' expectations about live television and its portrayals of children. In turn, the focus on ensuring the child artists have fun reinforces narratives that childhood is a time of innocence, helping to maintain a comforting distinction between culture (fun) and politics (not fun). Thus, I suggest that while each of these genres can work independently to depoliticize events, issues, and identities, it is Junior Eurovision's double-edged status as a spectacular musical event and one starring and aimed at children that keeps children from being recognized as having political identities and agency twice over.

## Break the Ice: Locating Junior Eurovision in IR

Children and young people in global and international politics are routinely portrayed through narrow discourses that limit the roles they can play or be seen to play in international spaces. For the most part, this means narrow frames as either victims, empowered, exceptionalized figureheads like Greta Thunberg and Malala Yousafzai, or delinquents (Cobbet 2014; Berents 2016; Lee-Koo 2018). Each of these formulations is grounded in particularly Eurocentric conceptions of childhood as a time of innocence and tend to assume not only that non-political childhood is the normative ideal, but also that children—with only rare, iconic exceptions—are intrinsically incapable of understanding and expressing political views (Beier 2018: 174; Lee-Koo 2020: 27).

As Helen Berents (2016: 516; 2020) points out, these frames mean children are permitted in the international public sphere only in certain ways: as vulnerable, silent, suffering from violence or tragedy, and in need of protection; as ratbags and deviants whose participation in adult forms of violence and disruption threatens domestic or international peace; or as heroes, brave, empowered, future-oriented, resilient, and productive. They play powerful roles in shaping how, when, and in what contexts children are acknowledged as political actors. Much of the recent scholarship in this field therefore focuses on critiquing essentializing representations by drawing attention to patterns of agency among children and young people—moving beyond the idea that they have agency at all (of course they do) to examine the nuances of when, where, and how they exercise it (Jacobs 2014; Holzscheiter 2018; Watson 2006, 2020; Loveday, Rivett, and Walters 2021). Childhood studies take this approach further, recognizing agency not as an innate individual quality, but as interdependent and relational. Children and adults alike continually negotiate expressions of agency and power—good and bad—in relation to each other and in relation to intersections of class, race, gender, maturity, and the constraints and opportunities of different environments (Hanson 2016; Abebe, 2019).

Nonetheless, scholarship on children in IR has so far predominantly analyzed what might be considered the "traditional" subjects of international politics—war, security, human rights, labor, and activism (Nordstrom 1999; Jacobs 2014; Holzscheiter 2016). The relationship between politics and young people in international cultural spaces—in art, literature, music, sport, and mega events like Eurovision—has received less attention, except where these topics intersect with more traditional IR subjects such as peacebuilding or transitional justice (Aradau and Hill 2013; Pruitt 2013; McEvoy-Levy 2018; Hasić 2022; Jmal and Ladisch 2022).

But mega events and their organizing institutions are highly political spaces, sites where competition among nations can play out in (supposedly) harmless ways, as

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/17/4/olad019/7323588 by Helsinki University Library user on 10 November 2023

well as places where local and transnational advocacy groups or individual actors can engage in acts of "spectacular everyday resistance" in front of enormous global audiences (Press-Barnathan and Lutz 2020: 733). Children and young people are a core part of the politics of mega events. Thirteen-year-old Nikki Webster, for example, became a symbol of the multicultural-but-harmonious-Australia narrative strategically pushed by the Howard Government when she performed alongside Yolngu songman, Djakapurra Munyarryun, at the opening ceremony of the 2000 Sydney Olympics (Heinz Housel 2007: 449). Other young people participate in mega event politics in ordinary ways, as spectators to performances of nationalism and resistance. Moreover, the focus on culture only in relation to "high politics" runs the risk of reinforcing assumptions that children are only innocents or heroes, because it only examines them in spaces of crisis. To this end, if we want to paint a more complete picture of the roles and agency of young people in international politics, we must pay more attention to the links between politics and young people in the cultural sphere.

As an entertainment program aimed at and starring young people, Junior Eurovision is obviously a far cry from a war zone or protest or speech at the United Nations. Lower viewing figures mean it does not reach the same heights as Eurovision or other mega events, in scale or intensity. In recent years, television viewing figures have hovered around 7–8 million people, while the highest was 11.6 million people in 2019 (EBU 2019), compared to the 150+ million audiences Eurovision attracts—although the EBU reports 33 million viewers for the 2022 Junior contest with online and social media engagements (JuniorEurovision.tv 2022). But the contest is not a strictly everyday or mundane political space like home or school either. There are certainly elements of what Shannon Jones and Jelena Subotić (2011: 543) call the "everyday ordinariness" of identity construction—silly, gentle moments where the artists muck around together backstage, learning greetings and lyrics in each other's languages. Nonetheless, the performers are undeniably operating in a spectacular international space and at what is, for many of them, a once-in-a-lifetime event.

Yet at the same time as scholarship on children and young people in IR overlooks the political dynamics surrounding children at cultural events, Eurovision scholarship neglects Junior Eurovision. Despite a vast body of academic work and public commentary exploring the politics of Eurovision—from studies of performances as expressions of national or European identities (Baker 2008; Fricker and Gluhović 2013; Kalman, Wellings, and Jacotine 2019) to cultural diplomacy and nation branding (Jordan 2014; Carniel 2019; Kiel 2020) to queer and racial dynamics on and offstage (Mutsaers 2007; Rehberg 2007; Baker 2017; Halliwell 2018)—only a handful of titles mention the Junior contest, and then usually only in passing. A bibliography of Eurovision scholarship compiled by the fan-run website, *ESC in Context*, contains over 175 articles and books on various aspects of the ESC (ESC in Context, 2021); barely any of them mention JESC at all. One notable exception is Paul Allatson's (2007: 88) work on the role of kitsch in providing the European unity project with a "governing aesthetic," in which he draws on detailed analysis of the kitschy performance of the 2004 JESC winner, María Isabel, and her song, *Antes muerta que sencilla (I'd Rather Be Dead Than Plain)*. Likewise, Jessica Carniel (2015: 18) briefly notes similarities in Australia's selection processes for both contests, while Dean Vuletic (2018: 198) points out that although Belarus had an underwhelming track record at ESC, it has won and hosted JESC several times. In each of these mentions, the JESC is presented as a copy of the adult contest, containing the same cultural and political dynamics in a smaller, cuter form. As Allatson (2007: 94) writes, "María Isabel's young age presents no hindrance to the play of ethno-national, adult and gender significations in the service of continental unity." Thus, these works also reinforce dominant assumptions of children as apolitical innocents, attributing any political symbolism to the apparatus of Eurovision without considering the unique features of the Junior event or differences in the interests and actions of the young artists.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/17/4/olad019/7323588 by Helsinki University Library user on 10 November 2023

**Feel the Magic: The Affective Genres of Junior Eurovision**

Representing their countries in an international competition and proudly waving flags for the cameras, the Junior Eurovision artists are clearly part of the broad machineries of cultural diplomacy and global politics, articulating or embodying various political messages in similar ways to their adult counterparts. But the impact of their political expressions and the recognition that they make political expressions at all are muted, left out of scholarship and public commentary about Eurovision and/or children in IR in ways that reinforce assumptions that children do not have political agency. In this way, Junior Eurovision illustrates a tension between what children *do* in international spaces, and what adults (are willing to) *see*. To untangle this tension, I draw on Lauren Berlant's concept of genre to argue that recognition of children's political agency by adults is tempered by both the format of Eurovision as "non-political" entertainment *and* by broader conceptions of children as innocents. Where both dimensions independently work to keep politics separate from the cultural sanctuaries of certain events, issues, and groups of people, combined, they work to remove children from being recognized as having political identities and agency twice over.

For Berlant (2008: 4), a genre is an "aesthetic structure of affective expectation," an institution or collection of recognizable norms and practices that allow audiences to engage with textual or social phenomena with a sense of familiarity. Genres are significant for their role in sustaining intimate publics—public spheres or communities connected by an "expectation that the consumers of its particular stuff *already* share a worldview and emotional knowledge that they have derived from a broadly common historical experience" (Berlant 2008: viii). They are grounded in affective attachments to fantasies of common, ordinary experiences or identities that through their familiarity and perceived solidarity offer "relief from the political," making sanctuaries of cultural trends and spaces while the unsettling or dangerous realm of politics is handled elsewhere (Berlant 2008: 10). In this way, the genres that we often think of as "non-political" and the intimate publics they uphold are in fact *juxtapolitical*, thriving precisely because the joy and comfort they produce are made more appealing through their contrast to the depravity of politics. When participants in juxtapolitical spaces do occasionally wade into political territory, they do so only to restore the order that facilitates their ambivalence and to right the wrongs that required them to acknowledge politics in the first place (Berlant 2008: x). The routines and conventions of genre are therefore vital for fostering among potentially diverse individuals and communities not only a feeling of common interest, but also feelings of peace and order. Genres are flexible enough to absorb "all kinds of small variations or modifications," but coherent enough to be familiar and comforting, gifting audiences "the pleasure of encountering what they expected, with details varying the theme" (2008: 4).

Genre is a familiar concept to IR, although the focus so far has been on traditional understandings of text-based genres. Literary genres such as poetry, fiction, and magical realism have been used as methods to understand how different knowledges are created and interpreted (Agathangelou and Ling 2005; Tripathi 2022), while popular culture and world politics scholarship recognizes the roles of textual and film genres in creating "expectations about what kind of political commentary, if any, we will hear" (Kiersey and Neumann 2015: 75). Visual IR similarly emphasizes how image genres convey recognizable understandings of the world, mixing what is real with what is captured in a way that "masks the political values that such photographic representations embody" (Bleiker 2018: 13).

I find Berlantian genre a useful addition to these conversations because it expands genre beyond traditional text and media representations to ways of conceptualizing identities and their associated experiences or normative affective expectations. As Berlant (2008: 4) explains:

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/17/4/olad019/7323588 by Helsinki University Library user on 10 November 2023

> To call an identity like a sexual identity a genre is to think about it as something repeated, detailed, and stretched while retaining its intelligibility, its capacity to remain readable or audible across the field of all its variations. For femininity to be a genre *like* an aesthetic one means that it is a structure of conventional expectation that people rely on to provide certain kinds of affective intensities and assurances.

As a televised music competition and a vehicle for a particular vision of European community, Junior Eurovision is part of a literal textual genre as well as an affective one. Conceptualizing the relations between childhood and entertainment as intersecting genres puts them on more equal ground as objects of analysis, allowing space to explore the connections between textual/aesthetic genres and affective/identity genres. Berlant's formulation of genre helps us to understand the affective attachments and expectations we associate with certain identities or experiences—and why we consider them political or non-political. It provides a framework that highlights what we recognize as normative, expected, and familiar for a given identity or experience while maintaining the flexibility necessary to contain overlapping and internally inconsistent variations of "politically incoherent" people and publics (Berlant 2008: xi). In other words, affective genres provide the tropes and narrative conventions necessary to make the lives we lead and how they make us feel recognizable to others, whether "in life or in art" (Berlant 2011: 6).

Building on Berlant's framework, I suggest that Eurovision and Junior Eurovision are sustained by different genres, producing slightly different expectations and emotional attachments about the nature of the events and the place—or lack of place—of politics within them. Where adult Eurovision and its fantasy of politics-free musical Europeanization are held together primarily by the aesthetics and expectations of entertainment, Junior Eurovision is shaped by an intersection of entertainment and adult conceptions of childhood.

As the EBU's flagship event since 1956, Eurovision's dominant genre is the textual/aesthetic one of entertainment. It is, after all, a live television show first and foremost, designed to accrue as many viewers as possible by providing several hours of spectacular escapism. Eurovision creates feelings of belonging to a European (and increasingly global) community with a shared interest in music by structuring emotions such as passion, excitement, and suspense around a highly routinized program (Pajala 2013: 81). The show features a consistent format and rules with some variations. For instance, despite multiple alterations to the voting systems over time, the contest always retains the beloved tradition of each participating country announcing their *douze points*. It also has a distinctive aesthetic—once famous for the kitschy appearance described by Allatson (2007), Eurovision and Junior Eurovision are both now supremely sophisticated events, defined by high-quality stage production, performances, and branding.

The aesthetic and programmatic expectations created by these rituals are therefore integral to sustaining fantasies of a particular European "good life" (Berlant 2011: 2) characterized by feelings of "community and abundance" (Pajala 2013: 82). They are also integral to upholding the event's non-political dimensions. The EBU works hard to keep overt politics out of the contest for fear of spoiling the show's glamorous fantasy of a (musically) united Europe with bloc voting conspiracies and vibe-killing pleas to national political situations (Pajala 2013: 86). In Junior Eurovision, the expected pleasures of the envisioned good life occur on stage, in the creation of a wholesome world where the child performers can have fun and express themselves creatively, and in the audience, where viewers enjoy watching talented children perform adorable songs. These expectations, and the joy and satisfaction we feel when the event conforms to them (or frustration and disappointment when it does not), help to mask the politics that make their way into the contest regardless

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/17/4/olad019/7323588 by Helsinki University Library user on 10 November 2023

of official rules. This is the first step in creating conditions in which audiences and scholars understand Junior Eurovision as non-political.

Junior Eurovision is additionally shaped by the affective/identity genre of childhood. Like Berlant's account of femininity as an identity genre, we can conceive of childhood as a particular collection of affective expectations. The narratives of children as innocents/empowered/delinquents that reverberate through discourses about children in international settings form the boundaries of adult projections of childhood as distinct from adult knowledges and behaviors (Brocklehurst 2006: 19). They reflect and reproduce expectations about what children can and cannot do and, in turn, how adults perceive and interpret what those children do in fact. In these narratives, the normative childhood is one characterized by *fun*: children must prepare for adult life through formal education, but they are also entitled to form friendships, express themselves, and, if they are deemed particularly talented, be encouraged to pursue the talent as ambition (in ways that ultimately reflect adult, liberal-capitalist conceptions of success). As Jana Tabak (2020: 72) notes, normative childhood also represents a universalizing vision of the world in which children prepare to become model global citizens via a childhood that is "happy, innocent and safe." Children who fall outside this vision of what Tabak (2020) calls the "world-child," such as child soldiers—or perhaps in the case of Junior Eurovision, spoiled, bratty child stars—pose a threat to that international order because they draw attention to a state of the world that has failed to protect them. In this sense, normative representations of childhood provide sentimental comfort for adults, imbuing feelings of hope, optimism, future potential, and relief from present failures—"for if nothing else," Berlant (2011: 171) writes, "their lives are not already ruined."

Political consciousness is almost always non-normative according to the affective expectations of this genre (Brocklehurst 2006: 19). Children who are praised for activism are presented as exceptions (Berents 2020: 50); their masses of "ordinary" peers face backlash for being at protests instead of in school because their exposure to politics before they are "ready" implies a crisis that threatens both normative childhood, and the legitimacy of the political order (Lee-Koo 2020: 27). Political unconsciousness is so central to the normative childhood genre that the disruption of innocence caused by politics is framed as societal moral failure (Berents 2019: 148–9; Moeller 2002: 49). This is how the second dimension works to mask politics at JESC: By assuming children are inherently non-political and creating events for them based around notions of fun rather than competition, adults create expectations that children will not and should not articulate political ideas so powerful that the well-being of humanity depends on their maintenance. Adults do not (want to) see or acknowledge children's political articulations when they occur because doing so draws attention to their own failures to have or provide peaceful, carefree childhoods.

## Let's Get Loud: The Silent Politics of Having Fun

The images and discourses of children as innocent victims, heroic icons, or potential deviants present throughout depictions of children in international politics are evident at Junior Eurovision. On the one hand, the event is fiercely protective. JESC organizers and all participating broadcasters and delegations are required to adhere to a strict code of ethics in order to protect the young performers (EBU 2021). The code requires "a safe and morally appropriate environment" and commands that decisions related to the children are "taken in their best interest, ensuring that they are protected from any inappropriate or unreasonable demands or behaviours." The EBU downplays the competitive aspect of the contest, encouraging "creativity, friendship and cultural exchange" to allow the children to "develop their experience and sense of community." The emphasis on fun and friendship therefore structures the event around emotions, practices, and aesthetics more com-

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/17/4/olad019/7323588 by Helsinki University Library user on 10 November 2023

monly associated with the feminized and everyday (Ahmed 2014; Åhäll 2018: 37; Beattie, Eroukhmanoff, and Head 2019: 140)—joy, play, sharing, laughter, silliness, bright colors—rather than the "serious" adult emotions of competition and politics.

National broadcasters hosting the event each year similarly stress the event's non-competitive aspect. Polish broadcaster, TVP, for instance, responded to criticism of the contest with a statement asserting that the "guiding principle of [JESC's organisation] is to promote the creative development and well-being of children" (TVP 2020). Broadcasters from non-participating countries, meanwhile, use the same language of protecting children and childhood to criticize the contest. Shortly after JESC's creation, the Scandinavian countries withdrew *en masse* to focus on *Children's Melodi Grand Prix* (now *MGP Nordic*), the regional program from which Junior Eurovision drew its initial inspiration, citing the social and commercial pressure they believed was being placed on JESC performers (Kirkegaard 2013: 95). In 2018, the head of entertainment at the Danish public broadcaster DR, Jan Lagermand Lundme, described JESC as incompatible with "Danish values" (Granger 2018):

> children are on stage and play adults instead of acting as children, and we think that is fundamentally wrong. Children must be children, they should not try to strive to be something they are not. . .Participating in a concept like Junior Eurovision would be a natural step for us after *MGP*, but it does not work when we do not feel the show fits the Danish values.

On the other hand, JESC is presented as an environment for fostering young talent, encouraging children to think of themselves as empowered artists pursuing their passion for music. As TVP noted after hosting, "For most of the young participants, it is also a great opportunity to start a singing career" (TVP 2020). Many of the artists continue to perform into adulthood, including graduating from JESC to ESC. But while this approach recognizes the artists' creative agency, it does not stretch to acknowledging their political personhood. The EBU's famous rule that ESC is a "non-political event" is even more pronounced at JESC, to the extent that the possibility that the contest or the children participating in or watching it could be political is not raised at all. The no-politics rule is easily found on the Eurovision website (Eurovision.tv 2023) and is frequently referred to in EBU press releases, media coverage, and fan discussions each year, but neither the JuniorEurovision.tv website nor the JESC Code of Ethics make any mention of the need to exclude political messages or actions from the Junior contest. As others have frequently argued, the idea that ESC is a non-political event is itself a political stance, as the EBU determines what counts as "too political" or not for Eurovision (Carniel 2019; Kalman, Wellings, and Jacotine 2019). The total absence of discussions about prohibiting politics at JESC takes this stance even further, casting children as inherently non-political innocents simply by remaining silent on the possibility that they could be anything else.

### *Share the Joy: The Common Song*

Genres intersect to quiet the political symbols and implications of Junior Eurovision in one of the main format differences between ESC and the Junior Contest: the Common Song. All participants in a given year perform a song together as part of the interval or opening act. The songs relate to the theme of each contest, and usually share the same name as the event theme—*Share the Joy, Move the World, Imagine*, and so on. It provides a fun, joyful interval performance while the votes are being counted, and an additional opportunity for the artists to perform and collaborate. In this way, the common song reflects the EBU's emphasis on fostering emerging talent and ensuring the children enjoy themselves. The common song is also a valuable entry point for exploring the nuances of children's political agency in relation to adult and institutional actors because, although the children

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/17/4/olad019/7323588 by Helsinki University Library user on 10 November 2023

perform the song, the concept is an invention of the EBU and the songs are written and choreographed by adults. It therefore highlights the ways different agents work with or through each other, and how children's own political personhood is shaped by the conventions of adult-constructed genres that keep Junior Eurovision juxtapolitical.

This juxtapoliticization is achieved in two notable ways. First, the lyrics and messages contained in the songs tend to reflect the kind of non-political politics prominent throughout Eurovision. They focus on themes of unity, friendship, youth empowerment, and working together to change the world. In performing these themes, the common songs contribute to the affective fantasy of European cosmopolitanism by presenting an image of a united, liberal Europe (Berlant 2008; Jones and Subotić 2011). Lyrics like "look at your dreams come true/We're gonna move the world" (Chmiel-Gromala and Gromee 2020) and "I believe if we do this together/You will see, that life it's so much better" (Maxu et al 2014) tie European pride to personal success and ambition. In this sense, European unity is not only the key to future progress for the world, but also a key aspiration for young artists pursuing their dreams.

These affects are channeled through the interval programming at ESC too, although the specific types of performances depend a lot more on the choices of the host country. In 2016, for example, Swedish hosts Måns Zelmerlöw and Petra Mede poked fun at the connection between success and the European peace and unity narrative, instructing the audience to create a winning Eurovision song by singing about *Love, Love, Peace, Peace* (Kalman, Wellings, and Jacotine 2019: 14). The JESC common songs are more earnest; rather than the reflexive, slightly ironic tone of Sweden's comedy acts, the songs express their underlying messages through simple, catchy lyrics, and the artists perform side by side, waving flags and swapping hugs and high fives. Genred tropes of normative childhood as one characterized by friendship and creativity but not by political awareness work in overdrive here to maintain the wholesome innocence of the common songs. Where features of entertainment as a genre welcome nationalism and Europeanism at adult Eurovision so long as they are fun—or better yet, *funny*—the childhood dimension of Junior Eurovision means that when adult songwriters and producers create the common songs, their choices reflect adult conceptions of what childhood should look like: full of opportunities for (capital-producing) creativity and success that support national and European fantasies without drawing attention to them. In turn, the children's live performances embody these conceptions in ways that confirm adults' sentimentality, leaving little room for the children's own potential reflexivity.

Second, the common songs have a direct connection to global development programs. The first common song in 2007, *One World*, was commissioned by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the earnings from releasing the recordings each year are donated to UNICEF and other children's charities. As charities and non-government organizations, bodies like the Dutch Kids' Rights Foundation (involved in the contests hosted in the Netherlands) skirt the EBU's prohibition on commercial sponsorship, but as an official agency of the United Nations, UNICEF is undeniably an international political actor. By performing the common songs, then, the JESC artists are co-opted into the political decisions of adults and adult-run institutions, and afforded little space to resist or critique these choices.[1] The common song is an important part of the social experience and television programming of Junior Eurovision; the children do not have the contractual or relational

[1]My point here is not to suggest that the child artists do not want to support the work of UNICEF, either because of their own normative commitments to the agency's work or to pursue their own career or personal interests. After winning Junior Eurovision in 2021, for example, Malena was appointed UNICEF Armenia's National Ambassador and spoke about gaining "so much inspiration" from the young people she met through her work (UN Armenia 2022). Rather, I want to point out the power dynamic of participating in events for fun that makes it difficult for children—or anyone—to form or articulate alternative perspectives.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/17/4/olad019/7323588 by Helsinki University Library user on 10 November 2023

power to decline to participate because doing so means missing out on screen time during the crucial voting period, as well as on a key bonding experience with other participants.

In earlier iterations of the common song performance, UNICEF-provided images of children in need were projected behind the artists. This creates a stark visual representation of the inequality surrounding which children get to exercise agency in international spaces: In *One World*, European children sing "we're the future, we'll make the world a better place" (Rietbergen and Molendijk 2007) physically positioned in front of silent, nameless African children facing poverty and hunger. Using JESC and the common song to raise money on behalf of UNICEF while denying any political associations therefore ties the performers not only to European integration, but also to the global liberal international order and to the paternalism and imperialism inherent in UN-led development programs. The "adorable liberal racism" (Berlant 2008: 46) of these performances relies on images, lyrics, and feelings of sharing and working together to construct for audiences what Berlant (2008: 54) describes as "the right feelings about what is wrong"—in this case, a simple, feel-good message about improving the future that glosses over the violent realities of Europe's colonial past and the contemporary world order.

Singing in unison for global development reifies the universalizing narrative of the normative or "world child" as innocent and earnest (Tabak 2020: 72). Wealthy, mostly white, mostly European children become good global citizens by participating in age-appropriate charity work, while their poor, nameless, mostly Black, mostly African counterparts interrupt visions of the stable, peaceful world order in which normative childhood can exist. It mirrors the "girl power" effects documented in other global development programs that construct girls and other children in low-income countries as silent and powerless, while encouraging "Western girls to associate poverty, gender discrimination, and violence with the Global South" (Bent 2013: 10). The expectations of racial genres and white European adults' sentimentality work here as a third intersection alongside childhood and entertainment, not only to remove children from political recognition to an additional degree, but also to distinguish which children are allowed what forms of political recognition. While children whose performances align with expectations of normative childhood are allowed to enter the "non-political" international sphere in heroic, world-saving roles, the children most directly affected by global inequality and whose lives draw attention to the harsher realities of childhood remain in the role of silent, suffering victims. Combining the "spectacle of the suffering child" (Burman 1994: 246) with the spectacle of the talented child decontextualizes the "crisis" of children as victims of war and poverty because the common song is designed to be fun. Fun and entertainment therefore not only structure how adults see children's agency, but also how children are encouraged to act and relate to each other by dividing who gets to have fun and to what ends along racial, class, and regional lines.

### *Fun in the Sun: Climate Advocacy On and Offstage*

The childhood and entertainment genres also mediate efforts by children to articulate their own political messages. This is particularly apparent in songs and performances concerning climate change and the environment, which is by far the most consistent theme at JESC. Alongside Gabor's winning performance in 2019, there have been eleven other songs with overt messages about the environment and climate change—and most importantly, about taking action to save it—since the contest began.[2] Other artists, while not performing songs focusing on climate change, have used the platform JESC provides to highlight their other music, which

[2]These are: Chanel Dilecta, *Bla Bla Bla,* Italy 2022; David Charlin, *Jer-Ana (Mother Earth),* Kazakhstan 2022; Dajte Muzika, *Green Forces*, North Macedonia 2021; Joana Almeida, *Ven Conmigo [Stay With Me]*, Portugal 2019; Marta Viola, *La Voce Della Terra [The Voice of the Earth]*, Italy 2019; Melani Garcia, *Marte [Mars]*, Spain 2019; Darija Vracevic, *Podigni Glas*

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/17/4/olad019/7323588 by Helsinki University Library user on 10 November 2023

does. Valentina, winner of the 2020 contest for France, used her interview with JuniorEurovision.tv to share Instagram pictures of her other musical project, a band called Green Team, made up of young French artists fighting for ecological issues (EBU 2020).[3]

This recent burst of environmentally focused performances, especially the bumper crop of five different songs in the same contest in 2019, might seem attributable to a ripple effect from the momentum of the global youth-led climate action movements. The School Strike for the Climate and Fridays for Future marches; Greta Thunberg's impassioned, articulate pleas for global economic and political leaders to act; and high-profile legal cases initiated by young people like the Portuguese Youth Case before the European Court of Human Rights are spurring a wave of cultural and artistic material created by young people exploring the increasingly urgent climate crisis. But this emphasis on the environment at JESC goes back further: The first song at the contest with an overt environmental message was delivered by Romania in 2008. In costumes emblazoned with symbols of nature and seasons, ten-year-old Mădălina Lefter and Andrada Popa sing *Salvați Planeta (Save the Planet)* in front of a blue and green globe. At the end of their performance, Lefter shouts "save the planet Europe!" to drive the point home. Lefter and Popa were also clear about the importance of their message in interviews leading up to the contest. In a promotional interview, Lefter (EBU 2008) explained why they wrote *Salvați Planeta:*

> After seeing how many disasters there are in our country and all over the world, melting icebergs, the cutting down of trees and the effects of global warming, we wanted to send a message to everybody to somehow make these disasters stop. We would like to tell the people that together we can make a difference.

The prominence of environmental songs at JESC is especially noticeable because there has so far been very limited messaging on other political and social issues that affect children in the songs. The artists frequently sing about personal or relational issues, like being themselves or bullying. Some articulate ideas of empowerment in abstract terms: they can change the world, they will not give up, and they are stronger together. But other themes with political tones that might also affect children—such as those that appear at ESC, including parents migrating to Western Europe for work (Romania, 2015) or children making the treacherous journey across the Mediterranean (France, 2018)—have mostly not shown up at JESC (yet). The absence of other politically coded songs at JESC draws attention to how profoundly the climate emergency weighs on the young artists.

Songs about climate change and the environment are also present at adult Eurovision, although the tone of the performances can be quite different. While the lyrics of songs like *For vår jord* (*For Our Earth*—Norway, 1988) and *Sweet People* (Ukraine, 2010) stress the severity of climate change, their staging relies on abstract motifs, particularly red lighting and wind machines, to produce affects of generalized urgency without explicitly applying the performances to the environment (although Alyosha's music video was filmed at Chernobyl to make this connection clearer beyond the live performance). Junior Eurovision performances, in contrast, tend to use much starker imagery: the children dance and sing in front of melting ice caps and burning forests. The two contests are, in effect, reverse images of each other;

*[Raise Your Voice]* Serbia 2019; Viki Gabor, *Superhero*, Poland 2019; Manw, *Perta [Beautiful]*, Wales 2018; Ana Kodra, *Mos Ma Prekni Pemen [Don't Touch My Tree]*, Albania 2017; Mariam Mamadashvili, *Mzeo [Sun]*, Georgia 2016; Madalina Lefter and Andrada Popa, *Salvati Planeta [Save the Planet]*, Romania 2008. Other songs, such as Sympho-Nick's *Spring Will Come* (Ukraine 2014) and Sofia Rol's *Planet Craves for Love* (Ukraine 2016), use nature as a metaphor for topics like love of country or braving personal storms, but I have not coded them as "climate songs" because they do not include specific references to the planet suffering and/or taking action.

[3]Since winning JESC, Valentina has gone on to join another musical group, *Kids United Nouvelle Génération*, which draws on liberal tropes of childhood innocence to campaign against child labor (see Hanson 2023).

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/17/4/olad019/7323588 by Helsinki University Library user on 10 November 2023

ESC performances mediate expressly political lyrics with opaque or abstract staging, while JESC performances mediate expressly political staging with the presence of smiling children.

The young artists at JESC are clearly aware of the impact of these dynamics on their ability to be taken seriously by (some) adult actors and institutions. Chanel Dilecta's song, *Bla Bla Bla* (Italy, 2022), chastises adults for their failure to prevent climate change, war, racism, and bullying. The song was written for her by an adult team, but as the performer on stage, she embodies the idea that being a child should not dilute the message, asking in the second verse (in Italian): "what does age have to do with half-spoken sentences?/It makes no sense, I think about it again and again" (Spera et al 2022).[4] In some ways, the song snubs the idea that children need adults' approval to express their political views at all, dismissing adults' false promises without action as meaningless chatter. At the same time, the familiar "bla bla bla" lyric and hand gesture with a foot-stomping dance present Chanel's frustrations in a form that reifies the expectations of a normative adolescence. The performance is a non-threatening, "non-political" expression of concern about the climate and war because it sanitizes the trope of a stubborn teenager rebelling against parents with the routine and repetition of a colorful three-minute pop song and sing-alongable chorus.

This is the intersection of genres in action. The expectations produced through the combination of the age of the performers and the cutesy, wholesome format of JESC create a gap between children's ability to express messages of political significance and other international actors' willingness to acknowledge or respond to those messages. Catchy pop performances by and for children keep the songs firmly in juxtapolitical territory, effectively neutralizing climate change as a political topic in the Junior Eurovision arena. Instead, adults see the songs through the sentimental lens of normative childhood, proudly declaring that "the kids are alright," but failing to take the calls to action seriously once they turn off the television. In other words, the songs become expressions of a topic that is important *for children*, but not worthy of sustained attention in adult discourses. This does not mean that children are not engaging in advocacy and achieving political aims in other ways[5]—the connections between JESC climate songs and broader youth climate activism demonstrate intragenerational solidarity and cultural production, for example—but it does point to barriers to being able to be heard by elite adult actors with the power and resources to take systemic climate action *now*. The EBU and national governments and broadcasters may be happy for young artists to contribute to the affective liberal cosmopolitan fantasies of European friendship and global development, but the artists' attempts to use agency provided by their musical platforms to pursue their political ends highlight the limits of adults' willingness to engage with this agency, and the relational variations in children's power in global politics more broadly.

## Imagine: Future Research

Junior Eurovision has always been filled to the brim with expressions of political hopes, dreams, and ambitions, from the institutional decision-making of the EBU and national broadcasters to the activism and patriotism of the artists. But while the genres of normative childhood and televised entertainment make these dynamics intelligible as creative ambition, they mask anything that might be read as overtly political, lest a message break through that spoils the fun. The processes of quieting and masking political dynamics are complicated by the interactions between adults working with and through children, and children working with and through adults.

[4]The original Italian lyric is: "Ma cosa c'entra l"età le frasi dette a metà/Non hanno senso ci penso e ci ripenso'

[5]I am grateful to Kesherie Gurung for this point!

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/17/4/olad019/7323588 by Helsinki University Library user on 10 November 2023

Through acts like the common song, adults place children in positions not only of embodying adult conceptions of childhood, but also of embodying adult sentimental fantasies of national and global liberal cosmopolitanism. Adults' choices in stage production, songwriting, and event branding highlight how children are central to projects of nationalism, globalism, and social and economic progress, as containers for imagined futures that bring adults relief and hope. Their constructions of childhood as a time of innocence and Junior Eurovision as a space of fun, protected from the political troubles of adult worlds, therefore maintain Junior Eurovision as a juxtapolitical intimate public, but they often do so more to soothe adult anxieties than to actually create environments that are meaningful for children.

Meanwhile, the performances and media engagement of young artists at Junior Eurovision demonstrate that children are aware of the conventions and tropes of adult genres and that they are able—in some contexts—to leverage them for their own purposes. So far, this has been clearest in children's recognition of adults' failure to protect their futures from climate crises, but the singular focus on the environment may change as other existential crises threaten their futures. Fourteen-year-old Zlata Dziunka (Ukraine, 2022), for example, plays the idea that childhood innocence is disrupted by political crises off the idea that children have the power to articulate messages about crises that affect them in the gospel-style power ballad she wrote herself about the unbreakable spirit of Ukrainians in the face of the Russian invasion. With a music video filmed in the basement of a church where local kindergarteners shelter during air raids, the song's lyrics demand an answer from god to her question "why my generation dying young in this war?" (Dziunka and ILLARIA 2022). She states her contribution to the war even more directly in an interview in the lead-up to the contest (Hogan 2022), explaining that "Any victory is important for Ukraine nowadays to lift morale. It's a great responsibility to deliver my song to so many people. And it is important that this message comes from a child. Children are touched by war too."

Children's use of Junior Eurovision's platform to share messages of existential importance, and their ability to leverage many of the conventions of adult-constructed genres to do so, complicates binary understandings of children's political agency as exceptional or non-existent. Children are clearly engaging in many different forms and degrees of political action, from overt climate activism to more subtle embodiments of Europe and global development. In some ways, the format and rules of the event itself limit what children can do—for example, by creating an environment in which the idea of not participating in the common song is not even considered, let alone adopted. In other ways, the impact of children's actions is constrained by adult perceptions of children as innocent, with the genres of entertainment and normative childhood working to confirm prior biases that children are not involved in international politics. In other ways still, children leverage the conventions of the childhood and entertainment genres, relying on assumptions that the space is not political to convey much blunter messages about war and the environment than would fly at ESC.

Most importantly, children's engagement with the genres of childhood and entertainment blurs the line drawn by juxtapolitical fantasies of childhood as separate from adulthood, and of cultural spaces as separate from political ones. Children are not necessarily trying to make Junior Eurovision more overtly "political," and their uses of the tropes and conventions of childhood and entertainment often overlap with or complement adult sentimentalities. But even if adults are reluctant to engage with children's political agency, the fact of children's advocacy on and offstage highlights the confluences of children's interests, ambitions, and agencies with those of adults, as well as adults' conceptions of what children can and cannot do in international spaces.

In this way, children's varied participation in Junior Eurovision speaks to conversations in childhood studies framing agency as interdependent and relational.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/17/4/olad019/7323588 by Helsinki University Library user on 10 November 2023

How child artists exercise political and artistic agency depends on their interactions with each other and with adults, as well as on how other agents—parents, musical teams, broadcasters, and audiences—perceive the interactions. Affective genres provide a framework for understanding these relations, for how the affective and cultural markers of separate structures or identities—not only childhood and entertainment but other intersections like race, class, gender and sexuality, and national or regional identity—overlap, contradict, or co-constitute each other in the processes of storytelling we undertake to make sense of the political as something culture provides relief from, rather than something that fundamentally shapes and is shaped by culture.

Recognizing the tensions and negotiations inherent in the relationships between what children do at Junior Eurovision and what adults see therefore opens up a range of possibilities for future research concerning children, cultural events, and international politics. For starters, further research at Junior Eurovision—and other international mega events aimed at or featuring children and young people, like World Scout Jamborees or Soviet-era International Youth Festivals—offers opportunities to explore the ways children negotiate politics and culture in relation to each other, away from the constraints of adult expectations.

Moreover, relational agency and Berlantian genre both shine brighter light on the dynamics that render international cultural spaces "non-political," including the ways separate genres intersect to enhance this effect by multiple degrees, *and* the ways people operate within them. Heeding how children interact in international political–cultural spaces, with each other, with adults, with their environments, and with the genres and fantasies that build and sustain the expectations, norms, and affects of those environments, therefore enables us to make much more noise about the ways culture quiets the political and vice versa. So, as the kids (at the 2006 Junior Eurovision in Bucharest) say: "Let the music play."

## Acknowledgments

Kesherie Gurung has been telling me to read Lauren Berlant for ages, and I am so grateful for the persistent recommendation and the conversations that inspired and guided this project. Ben Rosher read the drafts many times—thank you. I am also grateful to my EuroStorie colleagues, the participants at the 2022 Pop Culture and World Politics Conference, and the IPS editors and anonymous reviewers.

## Funding

This research was funded by the Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence in Law, Identity and the European Narratives (decision number 312154).

## References

Abebe, Tatek. 2019. "Reconceptualising Children's Agency as Continuum and Interdependence." *Social Sciences* 81 (8): 1–16.

Agathangelou, Anna M., and L.H.M. Ling 2005. "Fiction as Method/Method as Fiction: Stories and Storytelling in the Social Sciences." *International Affairs Working Paper*, 1–25. New York, NY: The New School.

Åhäll, Linda. 2018. "Affect as Methodology: Feminism and the Politics of Emotion" *International Political Sociology* 21: 36–52.

Ahmed, Sara. 2014. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Allatson, Paul. 2007. "'*Antes Cursi Que Sencilla*': Eurovision Song Contests and the Kitsch-Drive to Euro-Unity." *Culture, Theory and Critique* 101 (2): 87–98.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/17/4/olad019/7323588 by Helsinki University Library user on 10 November 2023

Aradau, Claudia, and Andrew Hill. 2013. "The Politics of Drawing: Children, Evidence, and the Darfur Conflict." *International Political Sociology* 7: 368–87.

Baker, Catherine. 2008. "Wild Dances and Dying Wolves: Simulation, Essentialisation, and National Identity at the Eurovision Song Contest." *Popular Communication* 6 (3): 173–89.

———. 2017. "The 'Gay Olympics'? The Eurovision Song Contest and the Politics of LGBT/European Belonging." *European Journal of International Relations* 23 (1): 97–121.

Beattie, Amanda Russel, Eroukhmanoff Clara, and Naomi Head. 2019. "Introduction: Interrogating the 'Everyday' Politics of Emotions in International Relations." *Journal of International Political Theory* 15 (2): 136–47.

Beier, J. Marshall. 2018. "Ultimate Tests: Children, Rights, and the Politics of Protection." *Global Responsibility to Protect* 10 (1-2): 164–87.

Bent, Emily. 2013. "A Different Girl Effect: Producing Political Girlhoods in the 'Invest in Girls' Climate." In *Youth Engagement: The Civic-Political Lives of Children and Youth*, edited by S.K. Nenga and J.K. Taft, 3–20. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing.

Berents, Helen. 2016. "Hashtagging Girlhood: #IAmMalala, #BringBackOurGirls and Gendering Representations of Global Politics." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 18 (4): 513–27.

———. 2019. "Apprehending the 'Telegenic Dead': Considering Images of Dead Children in Global Politics." *International Political Sociology* 13: 145–60.

———. 2020. "Depicting Childhood: A Critical Framework for Engaging Images of Children in IR." In *Discovering Childhood in International Relations*, edited by J.M. Beier, 41–63. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Berlant, Lauren. 2008. *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

———. 2011. *Cruel Optimism.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Bleiker, Roland. 2018. *Visual Global Politics.* London: Routledge.

Brocklehurst, Helen. 2006. *Who's Afraid of Children? Children, Conflict and International Relations.* Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.

Burman, Erica. 1994. "Innocents Abroad: Western Fantasies of Childhood and the Iconography of Emergencies." *Disasters* 18 (3): 238–53.

Carniel, Jessica. 2015. "Welcome to Eurostralia: The Strategic Diversity of Australia at the Eurovision Song Contest." *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 31 (1): 13–23.

———. 2019. "Nation Branding, Cultural Relations and Cultural Diplomacy at Eurovision: Between Australia and Europe." In *Eurovisions: Identity and the International Politics of the Eurovision Song Contest since 1956*, edited by Julie Kalman, Ben Wellings and Keshia Jacotine, 151–73. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

Chmiel-Gromala, Sara, and Gromee. 2020. "Move the World. [Performed by Junior Eurovision 2020 Contestants]." *European Broadcasting Union.*

Cobbett, Mary. 2014. "Beyond 'Victims' and 'Heroines': Constructing 'Girlhood' in International Development." *Progress in Development Studies* 14 (4): 309–20.

Dziunka, Zlata, and ILLARIA. 2022. "Nezlamna (Unbreakable). [Performed by Zlata Dziunka]." *European Broadcasting Union.*

EBU. 2008. "Lemesos 2008 /Participants: Madalina and Andrada." Accessed July 3, 2022. https://junioreurovision.tv/participant/madalina-andrada.

———. 2019. "2nd Biggest Audience on Record Share the Joy of 17th Junior Eurovision Song Contest." December 18, 2019. Accessed July 1, 2022. https://www.ebu.ch/news/2019/12/2nd-biggest-audience-on-record-share-the-joy-of-17th-junior-eurovision-song-contest.

———. 2020. "Bonjour Valentina!" 26 November. Accessed July 3, 2022. https://junioreurovision.tv/story/bonjour-valentina.

———. 2021. "Code of Ethics." December 17, 2021. Accessed June 22, 2022. https://junioreurovision.tv/about/code-of-ethics.

ESC in Context. 2021. "Bibliography of ESC Research." Accessed June 27, 2022. https://escincontext.com/resources/bibliography-of-esc-research/.

Eurovision.tv 2023. "The Rules of the Contest 2023." Accessed February 18, 2023. https://eurovision.tv/about/rules.

Fricker, Karen, and Milija Gluhović. 2013. *Performing the "New" Europe: Identities, Feelings and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest.* Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Granger, Anthony. 2018. "Denmark: EBU Wants to See Country's Return to Junior Eurovision." *Eurovoix News.* February 17. Accessed February 18, 2023. https://eurovoix.com/2018/02/17/denmark-ebu-wants-see-countries-return-junior-eurovision/.

Halberstam, Jack. 2011. *The Queer Art of Failure.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/17/4/olad019/7323588 by Helsinki University Library user on 10 November 2023

Halliwell, Jamie. 2018. "'All Kinds of Everything'? Queer Visibility in Online and Offline Eurovision Fandom." *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 13 (2): 113–20.

Hanson, Karl. 2016. "Children's Participation and Agency When They Don't 'Do the Right Thing'." *Childhood* 23 (4): 471–5.

———. 2023. "Kids United." *Childhood* 30 (3): 213–8.

Hasić, Fahira. 2022. "Art as a Generational and Geographical Transversal Tool in the Hands of Youth: *Srebrenica is Dutch History*." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 16 (1): 151–68.

Heinz Housel, Teresa. 2007. "Australian Nationalism and Globalisation: Narratives of the Nation in the 2000 Sydney Olympics' Opening Ceremony." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24 (5): 446–61.

Hogan, Michael. 2022. "'Homework Will Be a Nice Break from Performing': Meet the Stars of Junior Eurovision." *Guardian*. December 11. Accessed February 20, 2023. https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2022/dec/11/homework-will-be-a-nice-break-from-performing-meet-the-stars-of-junior-eurovision.

Holzscheiter, Anna. 2016. "Representation as Power and Performative Practice: Global Civil Society Advocacy for Working Children." *Review of International Studies* 42 (2): 205–26.

———. 2018. "Affectedness, Empowerment and Norm Contestation—Children and Young People as Social Agents in International Politics." *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 3 (5): 645–63.

Jacobs, Cecilia. 2014. *Child Security in Asia: The Impact of Armed Conflict in Cambodia and Myanmar*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Jmal, Nadia, and Virginie Ladisch. 2022. "A Voices-Centred Approach to Transitional Justice: Youth-Led Activism and Artistic Initiatives Open Spaces for Broad Community Engagement." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 16 (1): 118–32.

Jones, Shannon, and Jelena Subotić. 2011. "Fantasies of Power: Performing Europeanisation on the European Periphery." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 14 (5): 542–57.

Jordan, Paul. 2014. *The Modern Fairy Tale: Nation Branding, National Identity and the Eurovision Song Contest in Estonia*. Tartu: University of Tartu Press.

Junior Eurovision.tv 2022. "33 Million Viewers Tuned in to Junior Eurovision 2022." December 21, 2022. Accessed February 18, 2023. https://junioreurovision.tv/story/33-million-viewers-tuned-junior-eurovision-2022#:~:text=The%20European%20Broadcasting%20Union%20(EBU,Armenia%2C%20on%20Sunday%2011%20December.

Kalman, Julie, Wellings Ben, and Keshia Jacotine. 2019. *Eurovisions: Identity and the International Politics of the Eurovision Song Contest since 1956*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kiel, Christina. 2020. "Chicken Dance (Off): Competing Cultural Diplomacy in the 2019 Eurovision Song Contest." *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 26 (7): 973–87.

Kiersey, Nicholas J., and Iver B. Neumann 2015. "Worlds of Our Making in Science Fiction and International Relations." In *Popular Culture and World Politics: Theories, Methods, Pedagogies*, edited by Frederica Caso and Caitlin Hamilton, 74–82. Bristol: E-International Relations.

Kirkegaard, Annemette. 2013. "The Nordic Brotherhoods: Eurovision as a Platform for Partnership and Competition." In *Empire of Song: Europe and Nation in the Eurovision Song Contest*, edited by Dafni Tragaki and Franco Fabbri, 79–108. Plymouth: Scarecrow Press.

Lee-Koo, Katrina. 2018. "'The Intolerable Impact of Armed Conflict Upon Children': The United Nations Security Council and the Protection of Children in Armed Conflict." *Global Responsibility to Protect* 10 (1–2): 54–74.

———. 2020. "Decolonising Childhood in International Relations." In *Discovering Childhood in International Relations*, edited by J.M. Beier, 21–40. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Loveday, Lilli, Rivett Jenny, and Rosie Walters. 2021. "Understanding Girls' Everyday Acts of Resistance: Evidence from a Longitudinal Study in Nine Countries." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 25 (2): 244–65.

Maxu, Mat, Elton Zarb, and Gordon Bonello. 2014. "#together. [Performed by Junior Eurovision 2014 Contestants]." *European Broadcasting Union*.

Mcevoy-Levy, Siobhán. 2018. *Peace and Resistance in Youth Cultures: Reading the Politics of Peacebuilding from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Moeller, Susan. 2002. "A Hierarchy of Innocence: The Media's Use of Children in the Telling of International News." *Press/Politics* 7 (1): 36–56.

Mutsaers, Lutgard. 2007. "Fernando, Filippo, and Milly: Bringing Blackness to the Eurovision Stage." In *A Song For Europe: Popular Music and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, edited by Ivan Raykoff and Robert Deam Tobin, 61–70. London: Routledge.

Nordstrom, Carolyn. 1999. "Wars and Invisible Girls, Shadow Industries, and the Politics of Not-Knowing." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 1 (1): 14–33.

Pajala, Mari. 2013. "Europe, with Feeling: The Eurovision Song Contest as Entertainment." In *Performing*

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/17/4/olad019/7323588 by Helsinki University Library user on 10 November 2023

*the "New" Europe: Identities, Feelings and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, edited by Karen Fricker and Miljia Gluhović, 77–93. Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Press-Barnathan, Galia, and Naama Lutz. 2020. "The Multilevel Identity Politics of the 2019 Eurovision Song Contest." *International Affairs* 96 (2): 729–48.

Pruitt, Lesley. 2013. *Youth Peacebuilding: Music, Gender and Change*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.

Rehberg, Peter. 2007. "Winning Failure: Queer Nationality at the Eurovision Song Contest." *SQS: Suomen Queer-tutkimuksen Seuran lehti* 2 (2): 25–42.

Rietbergen, Jeroen, and Ronald Molendijk. 2007. "One World. [Performed by Junior Eurovision 2007 Contestants]." *European Broadcasting Union*.

Spera, Carmen, Fabrizio Palaferri, Angela Senatore, and Marco Iardella. 2022. "Bla Bla Bla. [Performed by Chanel Dilecta]." *European Broadcasting Union*.

Tabak, Jana. 2020. *The Child and the World: Child-Soldiers and the Claim for Progress*. Athens, GA: Georgia University Press.

Tripathi, Shambhawi. 2022. "But Where is the Magic? Emotional-Relational Humans and their Untold Stories in International Relations." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 51 (1): 157–83.

TVP. 2020. "Komunikat Telewizji Polskiej." September 23. Accessed June 23, 2022. https://centruminformacji.tvp.pl/50004122/komunikat-telewizji-polskiej.

United Nations Armenia. 2022. "UNICEF Appoints Junior Eurovision Winner Malena as an Ambassador." December 9, 2022. Accessed February 18, 2023. https://armenia.un.org/en/210746-unicef-appoints-junior-eurovision-winner-malena-ambassador.

Vuletic, Dean. 2018. *Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest*. London: Bloomsbury.

Watson, Alison M.S. 2006. "Children and International Relations: A New Site of Knowledge?" *Review of International Studies* 32: 237–50.

———. 2020. "Centralising Childhood, Remaking the Discourse." In *Discovering Childhood in International Relations*, edited by J.M. Beier, 243–61. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Downloaded from https://academic.oup.com/ips/article/17/4/olad019/7323588 by Helsinki University Library user on 10 November 2023

Jay, Zoë (2023) "Be Creative, Be Friends and Share Cultural Experiences": Genre, Politics, and Fun at the Junior Eurovision Song Contest. *International Political Sociology*, https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olad019

© The Author(s) (2023). Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the International Studies Association. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted reuse, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.