Introduction: Researching the roles of news in children's and young people's identities[1]

Cristina Ponte,
FCSH, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa

How do young people, especially children, engage with news discourse? To what extent does this engagement shape the construction of their personal identities as citizens? These two questions signal the following five articles of this section. They explore the complex ways in which the news media influence young people's cultures, including their incipient sense of citizenship, social responsibility, empathy with distant others, and capacity of self-reflection on their identities and trajectories. Presenting empirical research conducted in Israel and Portugal, the articles offer a trans-national, cross-cultural examination of these topics. Focused on children's relationship with the news, they also bring together a complementary range of conceptual and methodological frameworks for further elaboration.

The opportunity for putting together this unpublished research on children and news emerged from the collaborative work of senior and young scholars within the COST Action IS0906, *Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies* (2010-2014). As the chair of the Working Group on social integration, I am deeply grateful to Dafna Lemish for her enthusiasm in revisiting collected information in Israel and in reviewing findings taking into account updated literature review. I am also grateful to Martin Barker and Sue Turnbull, who warmly accepted the proposal of presenting this topic in the pages of *Participations*.

The topic includes interrelated dimensions of children's representation *in* the news and of children as audiences *of* the news. Since the following articles are largely focused on children and youth as audiences and as social actors experiencing different life conditions, it is worth to briefly highlight perennial signs of representation of children in the news.

Findings on representation in the mainstream news media

The content analysis of *representation of children* covers a spectrum of issues, such as the topic, geographic location, sources of information or the inclusion/exclusion of children's voices on issues directly related to them and others of social impact in their life, to name but a few indicators. Research on representation also includes attention on processes of

news production and reception, thus considering the cultural studies approach of the "circuit of communication" described by David Buckingham (2008). In spite of the rights of participation in public life presented in the Convention on the Rights of the Child approved in 1989, children and young people's voices tend to be silenced in the news of related issues.

Analysing children's representation in the news in a longitudinal perspective was the proposal of my PhD concluded in 2002, framed by Media and Journalism Studies. The news content analysis was led by the idea of considering the difference between *modern* and *postmodern* news narratives (Hartley, 1998). The author contrasts the four classical meta-narratives that organise news (conflict, progress, competition and accidents) with *post-modern* narratives presenting: *advice* on personal or ethical qualities for self, home or social improvement; *cordiality stories*, promoting basic information rather than a 'catalogue of anomalies' or 'accidents'; an orientation to a *private sphere*, where readerships are addressed as consumers/clients seeking entertainment for satisfaction of wants; and *identity*, based on items centred on the idea of a *we* community.

The particular context of Portugal moving from a rural and isolated society experiencing low levels of education and a long dictatorship (1926-1974), to a modern democratic state integrated in the European community in recent decades, made it interesting to look at what was published concerning children and related issues in the same newspaper under different political and social conditions (1970-2000). The analysis of *Diário de Notícias,* one of the oldest Portuguese newspapers at five-yearly intervals, provided an extensive picture about *what has or has not been published,* and *the ways* of writing and editing this news. The analysis would also include another Portuguese quality newspaper, *Público*, along 2000, and three European quality newspapers (*El Pais, The Guardian* and *Le Monde*) across one week. Through quantitative content analysis on the corpus as well as critical discourse analyses focused on headlines, images and voices, it was possible to identify *how* children were presented in the news (Ponte, 2007).

In 1970, under dictatorship, almost half of the items reported children as victims of accidents in brief news items. Villages and poor suburbs were the dominant space of the reported events, affecting mostly working-class children. Children were named and presented as *innocent*, *unfortunate* and *victims of the fate*. There was not any social dimension in this previously censored content. In 1975, during the revolutionary period that followed the Carnation revolution of April 1974, children and related issues were clearly outside the heated political agenda. The child was presented as the "new man (sic) in progress", and there was no reference to child labour in industries and rural work.

The subsequent analysed periods presented news produced in the context of consolidated democracy, inseparable from press freedom and the modern exercise of the journalism. In 1980, 1985 and 1990, Education, Health and Welfare policies were the main subjects, in terms of the classical meta-narratives of the journalism pointed up by Hartley. In the main body of the newspaper, the topics were presented either just quoting official sources, or in dramatic reports of events such as epidemics that killed children living in

slums. In the weekly sections, other meta-narratives already provided advice on childcare and education, as well as information about the advanced European Family policies, such as the conciliation of parental timetables with children at home. Between 1995 and 2000, besides the key topic of Education, daily news showed the consolidation of juvenile delinquency as a frequent subject and the emergence of news on children's sexual abuse. Visually, the open air spaces that had surrounded children in photos were replaced by indoor spaces, following a trend that had been identified in the '80s in the British press (Holland, 1992).

The comparison with another Portuguese quality paper, *Público,* in 2000 showed a similar presence of topics, both dominated by national contents. As the reported events do not coincide in many cases, this similitude may be read as a *shared professional culture* of news-values on children-related issues. The international coverage was dominated by the case of Elian Gonzalez (the family dispute of the Cuban boy and involving Cuban and US politicians and Justice Systems); this revealed how a *suspense story* involving a child receives so much attention in the news[2]. Five countries (the UK, Italy, Germany, Spain and France) provided more than ¾ of all European news published in the two Portuguese papers. The UK was far ahead, with 96 items, while just 13 items came from European institutions.

In the week-long analysis of the five newspapers, the three most collected items related to the national and European geography featuring the following topics: Sexual abuse; Accidents and risks related to dangerous toys and food; Education. News concerning Africa, Asia and Latin America features as main topics: Child victims of war, persecutions or natural disasters; 2) Health and medical carelessness; 3) Child soldiers. Whereas the main European topics focused on situations commonly perceived as dangerous to o*ur children*, the main topics about Africa, Asia or Latin America were characterised by their otherness, distance and negativity. The *European child,* mainly photographed alone in close-up, was usually a white middle-class child, while children from Asia and Africa were portrayed in groups, as poor people or refugees. The headlines presented quite a uniform social position of children. *Exclusion* of children was frequent. *When* children were *present* in headlines, they were mostly passive targets, directly or indirectly affected by external actions. Presentation of children as social actors, i. e., people who are able to do things and who do them, was quite rare.

Similar trends were also visible in an enlarged research project on children and the internet in the news, within the EU Kids Online Project, in 2007, involving 14 countries. A snapshot of the quality press coverage not only demonstrated how the processes of commercialism and sensationalism affect the news coverage, it also identified cultural processes at work. As noted by the authors, "not only national stories and culture shape the media's constructions of childhood and how children's online experiences are framed. Also the framework focused on risks and negative *side effects* of youth's experiences online appears to be the result of a combination of factors: the suitability of both new media and childhood to be incorporated within a moral panic discourse on the one hand; and the

concurring news values that guide the selection and editing of news, on the other" (Ponte, Bauwens and Mascheroni, 2009).

In 2005, an updated research of the longitudinal analysis focused on the Portuguese media took place within the funded national Project *Children and Youth in the News* (2005-2007). The project enlarged the analysis to the Portuguese popular press and to a sample of TV news, covering more than 6000 items, and presented elsewhere (Ponte and Afonso, 2009).

The dominant topic related to children and young people was Education, a topic that built children as *becoming* adults. In this coverage, children were mainly mute actors within struggles between national policies from the Ministry and teachers Unions.

Other three key representations that emerged from the news items in the Portuguese press in 2005:

- The *threatened child:* this representation arises in topics ranging from diseases, accidents, wars, natural disasters and unexpected events that emerge from the risk society. From the view point of the adult reader, *this child could be your child*.

- The *abused child*: this representation tends to be associated with dysfunctional families and poor social environments. Generating a projection against those devil adults, *this is the child of others*.

- The *invested child*: this representation focuses on new trends, behaviors, consumption and lifestyles, mainly in the Health and Family pages. This is the ideal child that the publication shares with its readers mainly in magazines pages. *This is our children.*

In relation to these representations, different formats of coverage were visible:

1) S*potlights*: each year has a small number of cases that receive a tremendous media coverage for a relatively long period of time; they present a high number of items, diversity of sources, visual and special prominence, diversity of genres – combining informational contents and opinion (editorials, letters to the editor) – and even reach the front page; they recall and reproduce the novel narrative, with its suspense and uncertain end. Its relevance as an *ongoing story* in all media illustrates the tautology of *all saying the same*, also following the dominant frame.

2) *The repeated story*: this pattern is the most frequent. It is composed by *singular and repeated cases*, briefly reported, without voices or with just one, frequently disconnected from the other items and mainly placed in local or crime pages. Accidents involving children or police reports on sexual abusers' detentions are the main contents of these stories that evoke the continuous presence of *hazard* and *danger* in the everyday life.

3) *Emerging topics* achieve visibility due to children's advocates, organized and active sources able to promote studies or events among journalists. In this way, they move issues

from the margins to the center. A productive articulation between news sources and journalists favored a more contextualized and thorough coverage.

Listening to children's perspectives

Besides the focus on news contents published in 2005, the project *Children and Youth in the News* gave attention to children's voices as well as to journalists and sources of information involved in media production. The multidisciplinary research team included senior researchers on Education, Media and Justice and a group of graduate students, from Portugal and Brazil, some of them working on their Master and PhD theses and dissertations. The project provided an opportunity for supervised field work and for comparing professional practices between Portuguese and Brazilian journalists and their relations with sources on children's related issues.

The project generated a final conference and several publications, mainly in Portuguese. This Section provided the opportunity for making visible in English some of the unpublished results of the research. Maria João Leote de Carvalho, a senior sociologist and teacher of children and youth with special needs, and Juliana Serrão, then a graduate student of Psychology, listened to and analysed perceptions and interpretations of institutionalised young offenders. Combining a national questionnaire survey with individual interviews among "a population that has been rarely heard, the research revealed the placement of news as a "crucial link to the outside world" as well as a particular interest by the leading news topics – children in danger and crime and criticism for journalistic practices that diverge according to the placement of the subject as delinquent or social actor. Furthermore, through the activated processes of self-reflection, they reviewed their life trajectories and projected into an aftercare future.

Two other articles of the current Section are written by young scholars who participated in the project *Children and Youth in the News* as graduate students. Following the close of the project, Lídia Marôpo and Maria José Brites have been placing children and youth as participants in the processes of news definition, circulation and appropriation in their individual research projects. Both actively participated in the COST Action on Audiences and benefited from the discussion with senior researchers. As supervisor of their PhD theses, I am proud of their path and happy for having contributed to the visibility of their work.

Lídia Marôpo concluded a PhD thesis in 2010 which compared the Portuguese and the Brazilian contexts on the processes of negotiation the "identity of children's rights" among journalists and sources (Marôpo, 2013). Since then, she has a post-doctoral project focused on children's practices and perceptions on the news. Although the research project considers children from different social contexts, the article she presents in these pages is focused on a group of children marked by ethnicity and poverty. Using qualitative and participatory methods in a field work of regular contacts with children and youth during nine months, her research highlights the local pressure of the news related to violence and crime. As she says, "the experience of violence in their neighbourhoods and the insistent

news representation of this violence significantly mark the socialisation process" of children and youth who live there.

Maria José Brites presents some results of her PhD thesis completed in 2013 which focused on youth and their related skills for an active interest on the news media and on civic participation (Brites, 2013). The qualitative research involved a two-year long field work, that allowed the researcher to interview about 30 young people at different moments, from the beginning of 2010 to the end of 2011. The approach also involved participatory research methods that included the conducting of focus groups with peers on the role of the news in their life. The author presents two groups of individuals that revealed distinctive profiles: the politically engaged and informed participant *vs* the occasional and relatively passive participant. The analysis highlights individual characteristics and spaces of mediation, from the family and school to broader social and cultural differences.

Research conducted in Israel by the end of the 2000s also introduced relatively unexplored issues, such as the gendered nature of news consumption by children and youth, as well as attention to the ways they consider news targeted at themselves. Michal Alon-Tirosh and Dafna Lemish analysed children's perceptions of the genre of news and how they wish the news, either produce for a large audience or specifically oriented to the youngers, to become more child-friendly and relevant for them. The collected material for the analysis is qualitative in its nature: responses to an open-ended question from a large representative national survey, and a series of focus groups with a selected sample of middle class children. Their article contains a large and updated review on the role of the news in children's life (8-16) and on political socialisation and civic engagement. Findings reveal a desire for age-appropriate news, apart from the older age group, a result that coincides with findings identified by Brites (2013). Other characteristics related to contents pointed to by children include educational, informative, positive and interesting topics, the presence of humour, and the avoidance of scary contents. Besides attention to the particularities of religious-nationalist views in the mainstream news, the article also contains indicators of structural preferences at the format level.

Dafna Lemish and Rotem Pick Alony co-authored the article focused on the gendered nature of news consumption by children and young people in the particular context of Israel. The authors aim at exploring how consumption of news might be playing a role in the socialisation of children in gender-differentiated roles and appropriate behaviours and attitudes related to their place in the public sphere. A large and updated literature review on gender and information consumption is the basis for seven hypotheses. The research was based on the same large survey of schools with students aged 8-18 referred to above, and face-to-face interviews with a non-representative sample in that age range, in 2007. Results already include the increasing use of the internet for news consumption, although television was still their main source. The internet was the most valuable source of news for boys, while girls chose parents and family. Girls were much more affected by stories focusing on sex-offenders, they "personalised the stories and expressed strong emotions of identification and immediate fear for themselves or their loved ones", the authors note.

Results made visible the need of a "more nuanced and complex analysis and interpretation of gender differences".

Children and young people encounter media contents in particular conditions of reception. A recent article on what bothers European children online shows that factual violent content is a high concern about the internet, and a large part of this content is associated with the news (Livingstone, Kirwill, Ponte and Stakrsrud, 2014). As the authors noted, "where television news has traditionally been viewed in the family living room, the internet increasingly affords a privatised context for news viewing and decontextualises violence also by excerpting violent incidents from their textual and social context, reframing them as simply, disgusting or horrifying images" (Livingstone et al., 2014: 11).

Another sign of contemporary times is the reduction of media information targeted to young people, in spite of the recommendation of the Article 17º in the UN Convention. Recent research on children and the internet in the conditions of mobile media also reveals that searching and sharing information is part of their online experience: one out three children and young people (9-16) in five European countries report that they daily check information or satisfy curiosity when something interests them (Mascheroni and Ólafsson, 2014). The central place of social networking sites in the digital media environment inhabited by children as well as the fragmentation and individualisation of children's everyday practices place new challenges for the access to information and the awareness of the nature of available online factual information. If "ICTs do not produce citizens", the digital environment may nonetheless "provide spaces which may be used to develop new citizenship practices bridging the public and private spheres, linking news, entertainment and political communication in ways that do not simply lead to ever more commercialised and limited forms of citizenship" (Hermes, 2006, quoted by Carter, 20013: 260).

25 years after the UN Convention on the rights of the Child, and 15 years after the Oslo Declaration which placed the digital media in the enlarged agenda of children's rights, public attention to the role of children as participants in the media and convergent society is far from being considered. Systematic comparisons of news media representation of children may contribute to a public discussion on children rights, from the right of expressing their views to the right of privacy and its complexity in the current conditions of digital socialisation. Attention to the ways children react and reconstruct their relation with what is *news* in their everyday life lived in blurred contexts seems also to be indispensable for adequate processes of empowerment as citizens of the present and of the future.

An enlarged and comparative research that takes into account national contexts and cultures implies teams of researchers working together, and dialogues with all involved in the processes of news production and reception, children and youth included. The first steps have already been done in different projects and networks, and this section is one of the visible results.

Biographical note:

Cristina Ponte is Associate Professor at FCSH, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, Portugal. Her current research examines children and the internet; media and generations. Coordinating the Portuguese team in the EU Kids Online network, she also led the funded projects *Children and Young People in the News* (2005-2007), and *Digital Inclusion and Participation* (2009-2011), with UT-Austin (USA). A member of the Steering Group in the COST Action *Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies* (2010-2014), she is currently vice-chair of the ECREA Temporary Working Group on *Children, Youth and Media*. Email: cristina.ponte@fcsh.unl.pt.

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Notes:

[1] We follow Carter (2013) and others who use both children and young people, to refer experiences lived by those below the age of 18. The term "children" follows the UN Convention on the Rights of

the Child (1989) that includes that age borderline. The term "young people" is often used to refer children in their teen years.

[2] An even bigger coverage of a single case would be given to the disappearance of Madeleine McCann in the world press, in 2007.