Children's Rights and Family Autonomy in the South African Context: A Comment on Children's Rights Under the Final Constitution

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CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND FAMILY AUTONOMY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT: A COMMENT ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS UNDER THE FINAL CONSTITUTION

Tshepo L. Mosikatsana*

This Article investigates the nature and extent of the protection granted to children's rights in the South African Constitution. It concludes that the child-centered approach of the Constitution entitles children, as independent actors, to certain fundamental rights. Acknowledging both the parent-centered nature of the existing South African legal framework and the entrenched support for practices, many rooted in indigenous law and tradition, that contribute to the oppression of children, the author argues that the constitutionalization of these rights will contribute to the betterment of children in South Africa, proving to be more than mere moral exhortation. Under apartheid in South Africa, children, who were treated only as objects of parental concern and not as independent actors, were left to the mercy of the state. As a result, they lost any claim to their fundamental rights. This Article argues that recognition of the inalienable rights of children, in fact and not just in the Constitution, is the critical step in improving children's lives and ensuring the future of a democratic South Africa. Specifically, constitutionalization provides a basis for challenging racially structured and parent-centered child welfare laws and practices.

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INTRODUCTION

Mothers and fathers of South Africa we are the voices of your children those who live and those yet to be born

We are the undernourished the under-educated, the homeless and the naked

The voiceless victims of the infant mortality plague that has seen so many of us young ones buried before reaching the age of one,

We are your children

We call upon you today,
on our knees we implore you
to please create for us a new day
a new beginning, a new South Africa.¹

¹. LETTA MBULU, UNITY SONG (words and music by Caiphus Semenya).
The 1996 Constitution marks a watershed moment in the process of democratization in South Africa. This event has particular significance for South Africa's children, as a result of the Constitution's focus on children's rights in section 28. The longstanding acceptance of private or parental responsibility for child welfare in South African law makes the constitutionalization of public or state responsibility for child welfare such an innovative accomplishment. The magnitude of the transformation worked by section 28 is most striking when viewed in contrast to the South African State's historically antagonistic relationship with children.

Children, particularly Black children, were the main victims of human rights violations under the apartheid regime. As one scholar has noted,

5. According to apartheid policy, which found expression through the Population Registration Act 30 of 1950 (repealed 1991) and Proclamation 123 of 1967, Proc. R123/1967, a South African child was classified at birth as belonging to one of four racial categories: Black (referring exclusively to Africans), Colored (mixed-race), Asian, or White. Id. The first three categories were designated non-White. This classification determined a child's life prospects, including the child's future health, education, employment opportunities, and final place of burial (because cemeteries were segregated as well). Id. The government further reinforced racial segregation by passing several acts of legislation. See, e.g., Reservation of Separate Amenities Act 49 of 1953 (providing for separate public facilities, including restaurants, restrooms, and transport); Group Areas Act 41 of 1950 (providing for segregated residential areas); Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act 55 of 1949 (prohibiting marriages between Blacks and Whites); and Immorality Act 5 of 1927 (punishing Blacks and Whites who engage in sexual relations with each other with as much as five years in prison). For a discussion of the system of racial classification in South Africa, see Alan Mabin, Comprehensive Segregation: The Origins of the Group Areas Act and Its Planning Apparatuses, 18 J. S. Afr. Stud. 405 (1992); see also International Defense and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, Children Under Apartheid 7–8 (1980) (discussing the plight of interracial children); S.D. Girvin, Race and Race Classification, in Race and the Law in South Africa 1, 1–10 (Allen J. Rycroft ed., 1987) (discussing the deleterious effects of the Population Registration Act of 1950); M.K. Robertson, Black Land Tenure: Disabilities and Some Rights, in Race and the Law in South Africa, supra, at 119, 119–38 (discussing how different racial groups receive differential treatment in occupation and ownership of immovable property).
6. See June Sinclair, South Africa: Children and Political Violence; Divorce and the Division of Property, 29 J. Fam. L. 411, 412–13 (1991); see also John Kane-Berman, Soweto: Black Revolt, White Reaction 41–46 (1978) (describing how officers could detain prisoners indefinitely without allowing others to have access to them).
the apartheid regime in South Africa... embarked on a deliberate campaign of repression directed at African township children. Although accurate statistics are hard to achieve, the most reliable count available reports in the period between 1984 and 1986 that 312 children were shot dead by the police, another 1,000 or so wounded, an additional 11,000 detained without trial and almost invariably tortured, 18,000 more arrested on charges arising from political activities, and 173,000 held in police cells supposedly awaiting trials. Although the notion of child extends until the age of 18, many of the South African children targeted by the police were far younger, frequently as young as 11 and even younger on occasion.  

On June 16, 1995, the anniversary of the Soweto uprisings, South Africa announced the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This act, together with the inclusion of a section on children’s rights in the Constitution, pro-

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8. KANE-BERMAN, supra note 6, at 1–10.

On the morning of Wednesday 16 June 1976, twenty thousand Soweto schoolchildren marched in protest against a decree by the South African government’s Department of Bantu Education that Afrikaans had to be used as one of the languages of instruction in secondary schools. ... Police vehicles raced to the scene. ... no order from the police to the marchers to disperse was heard, and a senior police officer admitted at the time that no warning shots had been fired either. ... The first child to be shot was evidently a thirteen-year-old schoolboy called Hector Petersen. ... Then, in the words of one newspaper, ‘All hell broke loose’. ... Within two months of 16 June, at least 80 black communities all over the country had expressed their fury; within four months the number had risen to 160.

Id. at 1–2.


vided proof that South Africa had renounced its oppressive past and would pursue a policy directed at improving child welfare. By ratifying the Convention, South Africa committed itself to the full implementation of the rights contained therein. Additionally, the Constitution’s children’s rights provision incorporated some of the provisions of the UN Convention, bringing the influence of international human rights jurisprudence into South African law.

Most constitutional democracies, including Canada and the United States, have no children’s rights clause in their constitutions. Nonetheless, these countries have been able to promulgate laws and pursue policies that are child-centered. It is this child-centered approach, seen by some as a Western approach, that the drafters of the new Constitution brought to South Africa. An analysis of this effort to import a child-centered approach into South African law and of its potential for success in the context of existing legal and cultural structures is the focus of this paper.

The principal components of the South African legal system are the common law and statutes. Although customary or indigenous

11. These rights divide into the following three broad categories: 1) Protection: Children have a right to protection from cruelty, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. 2) Participation: Children have a right to play an active role in society and to have a say in their own lives. 3) Provision: Children have a right to have their basic needs met. See U.N. Convention, supra note 9.

Part of the enforcement mechanism is contained in article 43 of the Convention, which establishes a committee of independent experts, and article 44, which places an obligation on state parties to submit periodic reports to the committee on the status of children’s rights in their territory. Id. art. 43, 44. Article 45 permits the committee to request technical assistance from UNICEF and other specialized agencies. Id. art. 45.

12. The incorporation of international human rights law and international law into South Africa’s municipal law is demonstrated in the Constitution by sections 39(1), 231, 232, and 233. Section 39(1) provides that “[w]hen interpreting the Bill of Rights, a court, tribunal or forum . . . must promote the values that underlie an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom . . . must consider international law . . . may consider foreign law.” S. Afr. Const. § 39(1). Section 231 provides that international agreements form part of South African law. Id. § 231. Section 232 provides that customary international law is part of South African law. Id. § 232. Section 233 admonishes South African courts to interpret legislation in a manner consistent with international law. Id. § 233. See also John Dugard, The Influence of International Human Rights Law on the South African Constitution, in 49 Current Legal Problems 305, 307-12, 322 (Michael Freeman ed., 1996) (describing the role of international human rights law in development and operation of New South African democracy).

13. See T.W. BENNETT, HUMAN RIGHTS AND AFRICAN CUSTOMARY LAW 96 (1995). “In economically developed, industrialized societies, while self-sufficient individualism is the ideal, children enjoy a privileged position. Biological parents bear full responsibility for rearing children while . . . still a minor child’s interests are always preferred to its parents.” Id.

14. Common law refers to the Roman-Dutch colonial legal system and judicial precedent. For a discussion of the common law as a source of law, see DUARD KLEYN
law must be recognized and treated as a vital part of the legal reality in South Africa, it has traditionally occupied a position of secondary importance. The existing network of South African laws and practices pertaining to the rights of children is not, in theory or reality, child-centered. Indigenous law is rooted in the protection of the family, and its focus generally is on the community rather than on the individual. Similarly, much of the common law and the older statutory law is parent-centered. The most important statute for the advancement of children’s rights in South Africa is the Child Care Act, which, like much of municipal law that addresses the objectives of section 28, predates the Constitution. Most of the pre-constitutional child and family welfare laws tended to be patriarchal and also conferred benefits along racial lines. Constitutionalization of children’s rights provides independent ideological justification for reforming the racist and anti-feminist aspects of these laws. Likewise, Section 28 provides an opportunity to enact new laws that foster the democratic, child-centered goals of the Constitution. This significant potential for reform notwithstanding, efforts to realize these constitutional promises nevertheless must take place within an existing legal structure that is hostile to such ideals.

A key question for the success of Section 28 is whether its child-centered regime is compatible with the communalism of African

15. Customary law (also referred to as indigenous law) is derived mainly from current social practices. According to § 1(1) of the Law of Evidence Amendment Act 45 of 1988, customary law supplements the common law. The courts have discretion to apply customary law, which should not be applied if it conflicts with the common law. Id. For a discussion of the interaction between the common law and customary law, see BENNETT, supra note 13, at 51–65; see also KLEYN & VILJOEN, supra note 14, at 93–94 (comparing the common law to customary law); HOSTEN ET AL., supra note 14, at 1248–69 (arguing for the use of the comparative method when looking at indigenous law and the common law).


17. Id. at 616–20.


Specifically, we do not yet know whether the fact that section 28 borrows heavily from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child means that the Constitution contains an individualistic concept of rights, founded in Western liberalism, that is incompatible with an African communalistic way of living.

One potential conflict between indigenous law and the child-centered norms trumpeted in the Constitution concerns the age of majority. Under indigenous law there are neither fixed criteria for determining the status of childhood nor a set age for the attainment of majority. The attainment of majority under indigenous law depends largely on physical and intellectual maturity, initiation, marriage, and the establishment of a separate household. Both the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Constitution state that adulthood begins at age eighteen. The Convention does not compel states to pass legislation fixing an age of majority; consequently, there is no international legal basis for introducing a specific age for the termination of minority under indigenous law.

This constitutional conflict could have serious practical implications. T.W. Bennett argues that, because the attainment of majority under indigenous law does not depend on the attainment of a predetermined age, a child's legal status could be manipulated by its guardian to withhold certain rights that come with majority. In such an event, sections 9(3) and 28(2) of the Constitution could be

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21. "The African tradition is quite different. Here the welfare of the extended family predominates. Children have no especially favored position in relation to their parents or other relatives; to the contrary, a child's interests might well be subordinated to those of the family." BENNETT, supra note 13, at 96 (footnotes omitted).


23. Bekker, supra note 22, at 191; see also BENNETT, supra note 13, at 101-02 (discussing various criteria for determining the status of childhood in South Africa).

24. Article 1 of the U.N. Convention states that "a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years." U.N. Convention, supra note 9, at art. 1. Section 28(3) of the Constitution states that the word "child" "means a person under the age of 18 years." S. AFR. CONST. § 28(3).

25. Age of Majority Act 57 of 1972 could achieve this purpose, but the courts have not applied the Act consistently. See BENNETT, supra note 13, at 102.

26. BENNETT, supra note 12, at 102.

27. This section prohibits discrimination on the basis of age. S. AFR. CONST. § 9(3).

invoked to modify parent-child relations under indigenous law in order to attain a more favorable situation for the child. Bennett asserts that a strict application of the Age of Majority Act, or some other instrument reflecting international law and its embodiment in the South African Constitution would be insufficient. Bennett believes in the need for a system to regulate the control of family property, best achieved through statute, that would lead to protection of children's interests through detailed planning and careful deliberation. Thus, the claims of competing legal systems may once again require children to rely on the political process to protect their rights.

Though increased allocation of resources to children's care and education can improve these children's life prospects, children's interests cannot be met fully unless the children are treated as independent legal subjects rather than as objects of adult concern. The argument that providing rights for children necessarily will have a negative impact on the family as a unit is misguided because it relies on an anachronistic model of society that focuses solely on adults. The framers of the new Constitution rejected this model by including Section 28. They recognized that children's entitlement to protection of their human rights is not weaker because they are not adults. The phrase "children's rights" is appropriate because children have been excluded in the same manner as women and, in a similar fashion, have been denied certain fundamental rights. The difficulty with granting children rights is that their physical, emotional, and intellectual immaturity cause dependence on adults to assist children in exercising those

29. The application of the Constitution to parent/child relations is made possible by section 9(4), which provides for the horizontal application of constitutional provisions. For a discussion of the horizontal application of the Constitution, see De Klerk v. Du Plessis, 1995 (2) SA 40 (T); see also Baloro v. University of Bophuthatswana, 1995 (2) SA 197 (B); M.L.M. Mbao, The Province of the South African Bill of Rights Determined and Redetermined—A Comment on the Case of Baloro & Others v. University of Bophuthatswana & Others, 113 S. Afr. L.J. 33–45 (1996) (arguing that a definitive judgment has yet to be handed down on the question of whether the Bill of Rights extends to embrace infractions of the rights and freedoms enshrined in the bill involving ordinary individuals).

30. Bennett, supra note 13, at 104–05. Bennett states that "[i]f the courts were simply to apply the Law of Majority Act to Africans, some of the inequities of the current regime could be remedied by putting an end to a person's incapacity at a reasonable age. More, however, is needed." Id. Bennett's belief that "more . . . is needed" stems from his conviction that indigenous and customary law must be integrated carefully into the new South African legal structure, recognizing the different problems that the alteration of each separate practice raises. Id. at 104.

31. Id.

32. Penelope Leach, Children First 203 (1994).
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rights, unlike other rights recipients such as women.33 As Onora O’Neill has written, the fact that children “cannot claim their rights for themselves . . . is no reason for denying them rights. Rather it is reason for setting up institutions that can monitor those who have children in their charge and intervene to enforce rights.”34

Another potential concern involves the effect that a child-centered approach would have on the family. Is it appropriate to give children rights without cementing their obligations to their families? Does the protection of children’s rights without protecting the family as a basic unit erode family autonomy?

A child-centered approach to children’s rights may have a Western origin, but it has been incorporated into the South African Constitution and can and should be enforced within South African society.

I. THEORETICAL BASIS FOR CONSTITUTIONALIZING CHILDREN’S RIGHTS

This article examines childhood from a critical analytical perspective, adopting a non-traditional, child-centered approach that studies childhood as a discrete social phenomenon rather than a part of the family institution. To overcome some of the limitations of a formalistic approach to the study of childhood, this Article employs a socio legal perspective that integrates commonly segregated disciplines such as law, sociology, and political science.

Most social theories of children’s studies are parent-centered.35 Such theories rely upon the positivist functionalist approach that studies children as the concern of adults.36 This approach seeks to provide a context for the study of childhood. Noted social scientist Talcott Parson views the family as the site for socialization, a process whereby parents transmit social values to their children to instill conformity.37 Failed socialization results in deviance.38 Implicit within functionalist theory is the deficit model of childhood, which views childhood both as a transitional phase to becoming an adult and as a means of ensuring stability through social and cultural

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35. See, e.g., BENNETT, supra note 12; Boberg, supra note 3; O’Neill supra note 33.
36. TALCOTT PARSONS & ROBERT F. BALES, FAMILY, SOCIALIZATION AND INTERACTION PROCESS (1955). In Chapter II, Parsons analyzes the relationship between the structure of the American family and the socialization of the child. Id. at 35–131.
37. Id.
38. Id. at 144–46.
reproduction. Such an approach rests on weak sociological foundations because it views children as objects of adult concern and not as self-conscious social actors.

The critical analytical approach is child-centered in that it studies childhood as a fixed social category, and it locates young people in society within the variable of class. Children are viewed as oppressed, disempowered, and marginalized, not allowed to make decisions affecting their own lives. Giving children rights provides them with institutional means to influence these decisions. Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the basis for section 28 of the Constitution, promotes a child-centered approach and is consistent with the goals of the critical analytical perspective. The Constitution states that children and young persons must be permitted to express their views on matters that affect them.

Although children are a nonvoting constituency, it is hardly surprising that a child-centered approach is gaining momentum in South Africa. One reason is that the youth of South Africa played a special role in spearheading the struggle for liberation from apartheid. These contributions to the processes of political transformation received national recognition through South Africa's designation of June 16th as Youth Day, the ratification of the UN

39. See Ian Butler, Children and the Sociology of Childhood, in A CASE OF NEGLECT? CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD 1, 8 (Ian Butler & Ian Shaw eds., 1996) ("[In] a deficit model...[.] childhood is understood only as a transitional process, en route to becoming an adult.") [hereinafter A CASE OF NEGLECT?]; see also Lesley Pugsley et al., I Don't Eat Peas Anyway! Classroom Stories and the Social Construction of Childhood, in A CASE OF NEGLECT?, supra, at 56, 56 ("[C]hildhood is seen as an incremental, staged quest toward...adulthood.").

40. The critical approach builds on the achievements of "new criminologists." See generally I. TAYLOR ET AL., THE NEW CRIMINOLOGY: FOR A SOCIAL THEORY OF DEVIANCE (1973), who borrow from the Marxist tradition by including in the sociology of youth the variable of class. By applying the category of class to deviant youth, one views such youths as social actors demonstrating a form of resistance. Id.

41. See Howard Williamson, So Much for 'Participation': Youth Work and Young People, in A CASE OF NEGLECT?, supra note 39, at 162, 162 ("[C]hildren are oppressed, disempowered and excluded from any platform on which the real decisions affecting their lives are made.").

42. S. AFR. CONST. § 28.

43. See U.N. Convention, supra note 9, art. 12.

44. S. AFR. CONST. § 28.

45. South African youth resorted to boycotts of apartheid institutions such as schools. They also instigated rent and economic boycotts that culminated in violent confrontations with the police and military. Many of the children from Soweto and other parts of the country eventually fled into self-imposed exile in the neighboring countries of Lesotho, Botswana, and Swaziland. For a discussion of the role of the youth in the struggle against apartheid, see KANE-BERMAN, supra note 6, at 47-68; CHILDREN UNDER APARTHEID, supra note 5, at 95-118.
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Constitution on the Rights of the Child, and the inclusion of section 28 in the Constitution. 46

A further explanation for the constitutionalization of children’s rights may be the moral legitimacy that the concept of children’s rights enjoys. Commenting on the constitutional negotiation process that led to the inclusion of a children’s rights provision in the Constitution, Julia Sloth-Nielsen states: “Unlike other fundamental rights, where compromises between political parties had to be sought, there was no disagreement about either the desirability or ultimate formulation of the section on children’s rights.” 47 Disagreement does arise, however, in discussions of the implementation of newly constitutionalized rights.

II. CRITIQUE OF CHILDREN’S RIGHTS

The unanimous political support for the inclusion of a separate provision for children in the Constitution has not translated into universal support for the specific details of the provision. There have been discordant voices in legal academic circles 48 and generally among the populace. 49 The process that yielded the constitutional protection of children’s rights has been criticized, as have the concurrent theoretical debates on the need for and implications of constitutionalization. 50 Some commentators argued that the initial proposals offered weak protections. For example, Du Plessis and Corder stated that

the Technical Committee’s initial proposals for a clause on children’s rights were rather thin. In the Seventh Progress Report, for instance, the proposed clause read as follows: “Every child shall have the right to security, basic nutrition and basic health services and not to be subject to neglect, abuse or child labor.”

It was during the discussion of this report in the Negotiating Council that a representative of the previous S[outh] A[frican] Government remarked that “two pages

46. See Sloth-Nielsen, supra note 33, at 6–10.
47. Id. at 8.
48. See Michael King, Against Children’s Rights, 1996 ACTA JURIDICA 28 (criticizing the limited ability of children’s rights to protect children from anything but the most severe harms).
50. See King, supra note 48; see also LOURENS DU PLESSIS & HUGH CORDER, UNDERSTANDING SOUTH AFRICA’S TRANSITIONAL BILL OF RIGHTS 186 (1994) (criticizing the limits of children’s constitutional right to parental care).
are devoted to the rights of ‘criminals’ but only two lines to the rights of children’.. . .\(^{51}\)

Others have argued that despite the uncontested moral legitimacy enjoyed by the concept of children’s rights, the constitutionalization of children’s rights is merely safe political rhetoric that will not translate into substantive benefits for children.\(^{52}\) In this view, the rights rhetoric is not a meaningful way of delivering social programs for children.\(^ {53}\) It is stated that giving children rights in the Constitution, such as the right not to be maltreated or abused, will not affect how parents behave towards their children.\(^ {54}\)

The inclusion in the Constitution of socio-economic rights in section 28(1)(c) has attracted criticism. Many believe that second generation rights\(^ {55}\) should not be protected in a document that focuses mainly on first generation rights.\(^ {56}\) The difficulty with second generation rights is said to stem from the fact that the Constitution includes no mechanisms for their enforcement.\(^ {57}\) The structure of

\(\overset{\text{VOL. 3:341}}{\text{DU PLESSIS & CORDER, supra note 50, at 186. }}\)

Prompted by these remarks, the Negotiating Council instructed the Technical Committee to attend to the extension of the clause on children’s rights. The Technical Committee welcomed this opportunity, and proceeded to act on a series of submissions from the National Children’s Rights Committee which incorporated principles derived from international instruments on children’s rights\({}\). The Technical Committee was in the end satisfied that the clause it proposed... included all the rights of children which can be cited in [such] an instrument\({}\) with the exception of a reference to a right to a compulsory minimum education.

\(\overset{\text{Id.}}{\text{DU PLESSIS & CORDER, supra note 50, at 186. }}\)

52. See King, supra note 48, at 30–31. See also O’Neill, supra note 34 (arguing that, to be effective, children’s rights must be cast as obligations of the state, not as freedoms from state coercion).

53. See King, supra note 48, at 48–49.

54. See DU PLESSIS & CORDER, supra note 50, at 186.

55. Second generation rights are economic and social rights; first generation rights are legal and political rights. BENNETT supra note 13, at 99.

56. See Sloth-Nielsen, supra note 33, at 7.

57. It was said of the interim Constitution that

[o]ne of its major difficulties [was] that it was a preponderantly second-generation provision in predominantly first-generation environment. Neither Chapter 3 nor the transitional Constitution itself suggests how second-generation entitlements are to be enforced. Can a court, for instance, order the State to provide all persons under the age of 18 years with a basic nutrition and basic health and social services?

\(\overset{\text{DU PLESSIS & CORDER, supra note 50, at 186.}}{\text{ }}\)
South African democracy belies such claims, as the Constitutional Court has identified such mechanisms. The socio-economic rights contained in the Constitution include the rights to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services, and social services as well as the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, and degradation. A constitutional command compelling the legislator to provide free medical care to pregnant women and children does not necessarily create a subjective right to medical care or basic nutrition. The lawmaker must first create legislation fulfilling this right. This raises several questions. What happens if the lawmaker does not execute such a law or executes it inadequately? Can the courts offer guidelines as to the way in which the legislator can execute the directive? In Fraser v. Children's Court, the Constitutional Court did offer such guidelines. It ruled that the legislative command contained in section 8 of the Constitution establishing equality between children born in wedlock and extramarital children was binding and required the lawmaker to comply. Failure to comply within a period of two years would violate the Constitution. The High Court may also invoke its inherent powers to enforce socio-economic rights.

Concern also has been expressed over the implications of constitutionalization for the state. It is argued that giving the children's rights provision a justiciable character imposes an unrealistic burden on the State and, consequently, on parents. It is also asserted that courts are given the power to make decisions concerning the allocation of fiscal resources to various constituencies, decisions which some contend belong with elected officials. Granting the courts the power to enforce socio-economic rights does not constitute an inappropriate interference in the political process. A court hearing a constitutional challenge concerning the right to basic nutrition or basic health care services, will have to determine whether the level

59. Id. § 28(1)(e).
60. 1997 (2) SA 261, 273 (CC).
61. Id. at 273.
62. Id. at 282–84.
65. DION A. BASSON, SOUTH AFRICA'S INTERIM CONSTITUTION 46 (1994); see also FIROZ CACHALIA ET AL., FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS IN THE NEW CONSTITUTION 102 (1994) (criticizing socio-economic rights for allowing judiciary to allocate economic resources).
of the services delivered meets the basic needs. If it does not, the court will find a prima facie infringement of the right and inquire into whether the violation is justifiable in an open and democratic society. If the infringement cannot be justified, the court will order the state to comply with its obligations. The Court, however, will not make decisions of implementation and resource allocation that should be left to local officials. As Erika de Wet notes:

This does not mean that the court will be interfering with the allocation of resources. It will not be able to tell the state how it should relieve the basic needs. It will only be able to indicate to the state that it is constitutionally bound to ensure the basic needs of children which must be met before the state begins to allocate funds for any other projects and expenditure.

Many question whether the children's rights provision creates justiciable rights or merely consists of directive principles. Those who oppose giving section 28 rights a justiciable character argue that the concept of a children's rights provision in the Constitution is not to create justiciable rights but to create directive principles that will reinforce the unassailability of the concept of human rights.

At the minimum, constitutionalization legitimates political discourse on children's rights and provides political justification for government expenditure on social programs for children. It also enables the rights claimants, who are children, to make substantial claims against the State using the law as a sword. It further enables children to use the law as a shield to protect themselves from erosion of social benefits by the State. Constitutionalization, however, has much greater potential. It can create justiciable rights that children may enforce against the state. The plain language of section 28 of the Constitution reinforces this notion: "Every child has the right . . . ."
The reference to "right" implies that the drafters meant to create an enforceable claim.\(^7\)

In a democracy, the courts are not the only forums for compelling the State to act in a socially responsible manner. Socio-political factors, such as the voting power of the poor and the political clout of both social democrats and child welfare advocates, must be included in the enforcement equation. The poor constitute the majority of South Africa's population, and their children are the main beneficiaries of social welfare programs.\(^7\) As a political interest group, the poor are unique because they have sufficient voting power to compel the government to respect the rights enshrined in section 28 of the Constitution.

Constitutionalization also offers the government political justification for providing social welfare benefits to children as they compete for scarce resources with the homeless, the aged, and the unemployed. In addition to political justification, constitutionalization also provides the government with useful moral and legal justifications for its social welfare expenditures when conservatives and liberals demand fiscal restraint through reduced expenditures on social programs.\(^7\) The provision of free medical care for children under six years and pregnant mothers as well as the nutritional feeding scheme established by the President shortly after the 1994 elections demonstrate substantive outcomes, mainly benefiting the poor, that are built upon the framework of the constitutional reforms.\(^7\)

**III. Do Children Need Rights?**

Rights skeptics such as King and O'Neill argue that the protection of children's rights in conventions and constitutions is merely a moral

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73. See Sloth-Nielsen, supra note 32, at 12–14; John Kruger & Shirin Motala, Welfare, in FIRST CALL: THE SOUTH AFRICAN CHILDREN'S BUDGET 65, 107–08 (Shirley Robinson & Linda Biersteker eds., 1997) (stating poverty rates in South Africa remain very high and referring to a 1993 study estimating the number of poor people at 18 million or 45.7% of the total population).


exhortation and that the granting of rights to children is not a successful way of eliminating the mistreatment of children. King states that

[i]f we search globally for the causes of the most widespread and most severe suffering to children, we find not deliberate acts by adults to cause children harm, but rather such general calamities as war, disease, poverty, natural disasters, and family breakdown. Even if we restrict our search to the harmful effects of government decisions, we hardly ever find that there was any deliberate intention to damage children. King suggests that law be coupled with other social systems, such as politics and economics, to create a system that would be more effective in securing the welfare of children. He contends that this new system could provide economic incentives to companies not to employ children as well as to allocate greater resources to children’s care and education through families.

Law, as a closed system, is ineffective in meeting the needs of children and should be coupled with other systems; however, this reality does not preclude granting children rights. The constitutionalization of children’s rights provides the basis for operation of the political and economic incentives and disincentives that King discusses. King’s approach to child welfare is parent-centered in that it treats children as objects of adult concern. King’s rights skepticism is premised on the functionalist approach that views the family in terms of the public/private dichotomy, a common theme in liberal legal discourse. Public and private spheres of activity are characterized as separate, with parent/child relations labeled a largely private and unregulated sphere of family life.

76. King, supra note 48, at 39–40; see also O’Neill, supra note 34, at 35–40 (arguing that the rhetoric of rights rarely can empower children).
77. King, supra note 47, at 43–44.
78. Id. at 45–48.
79. Id. at 47–48. King does warn of risks involved in this approach. Putting pressure on governments and corporations to elicit the desired approach toward children and their rights can have unpredictable effects, and many attempts to couple politics and/or economics with the law have not been successful. Id. at 45–48.
80. Id. at 43–48.
82. Bainham, supra note 81, at 206; KATHERINE O’DONOVAN, SEXUAL DIVISIONS IN LAW 2–20 (1985).
The functionalist position is inaccurate, largely because child rearing is a public function. Consequently, parent/child relations should not be viewed as operating outside the public sphere of activity. The failure to regulate parent-child relations by giving children rights would reinforce existing inequalities in parent-child relations and idealize the family as a safe haven for children. In South Africa, child abuse, both within and outside the family structure, is commonplace. Child sexual and physical abuse is on the increase. Under apartheid, the government denied Black children most educational opportunities. Their labor was exploited by farmers and merchants. In addition, because Black children participated in the armed struggle against apartheid, they were the victims of police and military brutality. To curb these abuses and the resulting detrimental effects, the new South African Government had to grant children several rights. Children cannot be involved in armed conflict. They can be detained only as a measure of last resort. Children are entitled to legal representation. They should be protected from exploitative labor practices. They have a right to a name and nationality. Children also are entitled to protection from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation. In the following pages, this Paper will examine the ways in which these rights are recognized and enforced. The background to their inclusion in South African constitutional and statutory law will be studied as will remaining

85. Carmel Matthias, Removal of Children and the Right to Family Life: SOUTH AFRICAN LAW AND PRACTICE 24 (1997) (stating that “[i]n 1995, 28,482 cases of crime against children were reported.” This represented an increase of 20.4% over the previous year’s figure, which had risen by 37.6% since 1993.).
86. Tshepo L. Mosikatsana, The Role of Local Government in the Democratisation of Sporting, Cultural, Educational and Recreational Opportunities, in A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO HUMAN RIGHTS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT 55, 61 (Shadrack Bo Gutto ed., 1996); see also Sean Jones, Assaulting Childhood: Children’s Experiences of Migrancy and Hostel Life in South Africa 163–206 (1993); Children Under Apartheid, supra note 6, at 35–43.
87. Children Under Apartheid, supra note 6, at 45–54.
89. S. AFR. CONST. § 28(1)(i).
90. Id. § 28(1)(g).
91. Id. § 28(1)(h).
92. Id. § 28(1)(e).
93. Id. § 28(1)(a).
94. Id. § 28(1)(d).
obstacles to their enjoyment by the children of South Africa. This examination will reveal the logic of South Africa's child-centered approach and the implications of this approach for parent-child relations in South Africa.

A. The Child's Right Not to Be Used in Armed Conflict and to Be Protected in Times of Armed Conflict

During the 1976 uprisings, a large number of Black children were involved in the armed struggle against apartheid and died as a result of conflicts with the military and the police.\(^{95}\) Their experiences contrast with the assertion of King and others that most of the harms suffered by children are not the result of deliberate governmental acts.\(^{96}\) If, as King suggests, children do not suffer at the hands of the government, it is easier to refute child-centered policies by suggesting that protection should not come directly from the government. Section 28(1)(i)\(^{97}\) of the Constitution protects children against abuses similar to those suffered under apartheid.

There is a developed body of international law concerning the role of children in armed conflict. It is a problem that is not unique to South Africa. During the Iran-Iraq war, children were involved in armed conflict and were considered a powerful fighting force because of their lack of fear.\(^{98}\) Article 77(2) of Protocol Number 1 to the Geneva Convention Number 4 provides that children should not take a "direct part in hostilities."\(^{99}\) Protocol Number 2 contains a broader prohibition, forbidding the direct or indirect participation of children under fifteen years of age in hostilities.\(^{100}\) Article 38(2) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child places an obligation on state parties to ensure that children under fifteen do not participate directly

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95. Smith & Khumalo, supra note 88, at 259–64.
96. King, supra note 48, at 43–44.
97. Section 28(1)(i) provides that children have the right "not to be used directly in armed conflict, and to be protected in times of armed conflict." S. AFR. CONST. § 28(1)(i).
99. International Committee of the Red Cross, Commentary on the Additional Protocols of 8 June 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 847 (1987) [hereinafter ICRC]. The International Committee of the Red Cross unsuccessfully opposed the inclusion of the word "direct" as it would appear to condone indirect participation such as transporting munitions to the battlefront, which is as dangerous as direct combat. VAN BUEREN, supra note 98, at 334.
100. ICRC, supra note 99, at 1367. Van Bueren describes the duty on states found in protocol no. 2 as being "absolute." VAN BUEREN, supra note 98, at 334.
in hostilities. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the child prohibits anyone under eighteen from participating directly in hostilities. Islamic law may prohibit the participation in jihad of those under fifteen.

The experiences of South African Black youth during the 1976 uprisings and throughout the violent political struggle against apartheid illustrate the importance of extending the prohibition on the involvement of children under a certain age to indirect participation and internal conflicts. A large number of Black children died in internal conflicts with the military and the police. Chikane describes the structural origins of violence and its psychological and normative effects on Black children in the following terms:

[Conditions in the townships] have affected children more than many people realize. The world of the township child is extremely violent. It is a world made up of tear gas, bullets, whippings, detention, and death on the streets. It is an experience of military operations and night raids, of roadblocks and body searches. It is a world where parents and friends get carried away in the night to be interrogated. It is a world where people simply disappear, where parents are assassinated and homes are petrol bombed. Such is the environment of the township child today.

The international limit for participation in armed conflict is, effectively, fifteen years. In terms of sections 3(a) and 3(b) of the Defence Act, the minimum age for cadet training and in the South African Defense Force is twelve and the minimum recruitment age for military service is seventeen. Section 37(5) of the Constitution, which sets out the table of non-derogable rights, is child-centered in that it creates a non-derogable right for children under fifteen to avoid military service and it is consistent with the international standard for military service.

101. *U.N. Convention*, supra note 9, art. 38(2). The Convention provides that “States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities.” *Id.* art. 38.
102. *Id.* at 335.
103. *Id.* at 334.
104. As quoted in Jones, *supra* note 86, at 143.
105. § 3(a) & (b) of Defence Act 44 of 1957.
106. *Id.*
B. The Rights of Children in Police Detention/Custody

During the struggle for liberation in South Africa, the State violently oppressed many Black children who were responsible for spearheading the resistance against apartheid. Children were detained arbitrarily under conditions that were in violation of most relevant international instruments: article 37(c)\textsuperscript{107} and article 40(1)\textsuperscript{108} of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,\textsuperscript{109} the United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency,\textsuperscript{110} the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice,\textsuperscript{111} and the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of Their Liberty.\textsuperscript{112}

\begin{itemize}
\item[107.] \textit{U.N. Convention, supra} note 9, art. 37(c). Article 37(c) provides that "every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interest not to do so and shall have the right to maintain contact with his or her family through correspondence and visits, save in exceptional circumstances." \textit{Id.}
\item[108.] \textit{Id.} art. 40(1). Article 40(1) states that States Parties recognize the right of every child alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law to be treated in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child's sense of dignity and worth, which reinforces the child's respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others and which takes into account the child's age and the desirability of promoting the child's reintegration and the child's assuming a constructive role in society. \textit{Id.}
\item[109.] See Evadne Grant, \textit{Protective Custody of Juvenile Witnesses}, 5 S. Afr. J. Hum. Rts. 221, 226–27 (1989) (referring to principles 2, 6, and 7 of the \textit{U.N. Declaration on the Rights of the Child}; See also Falk, supra note 7, at 19 (arguing that South African forces have violated provisions relating \textit{inter alia} to custody of child offenders).
\item[111.] \textsc{United Nations, United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice} (Beijing Rules), U.N. Doc. A/RES/40/33 (1985). These standards require the state to impose criminal penalties on juvenile offenders in a racially non-discriminatory manner. \textit{Id.} \S 2.1. Under the Standards, a government's juvenile justice system must also emphasize the well-being of the juvenile, \textit{id.} \S 5.1, and provide basic procedural safeguards including presumption of innocence, right to counsel, and right to the presence of a parent or guardian. \textit{Id.} \S\S 7.1, 15.1, 15.2. The Minimum Rules also call for parental notification upon apprehension, \textit{id.} \S 10.1, diversion from the criminal justice system wherever possible, \textit{id.} \S\S 11.1–11.4, a speedy trial on charges, \textit{id.} \S 20.1, and use of detention pending trial and incarceration as punishment only as a last resort. \textit{Id.} \S\S 13.1, 17.1, 19.1.
One of the aims of the Constitution and post-Constitution statutes was to bring South Africa into compliance with the above mentioned international instruments. Section 28(1)(g) of the Constitution was enacted to protect the rights of children in police detention or custody.\textsuperscript{113} Section 50(4) of the Criminal Procedure Act\textsuperscript{114} creates an obligation for investigating officers to notify the parent or guardian of the arrest of a person under eighteen years, if such parent or guardian can be reached without undue delay.\textsuperscript{115} Section 29 of the Correctional Services Act\textsuperscript{116} was amended by the Correctional Services Amendment Act\textsuperscript{117} to bring the juvenile justice system in conformity with the child-centered approach adopted in the above mentioned international instruments.

Section 29(1) of the Correctional Services Act,\textsuperscript{118} as amended in 1994, proscribed detention in prison or a police cell or lock up of a person under eighteen years accused of committing an offense, unless his detention was necessary and no suitable place of safety was available.\textsuperscript{119} Section 29(2) of the Correctional Services Amendment Act made it possible for young offenders to be detained only in police cells or lock-ups, and not in a prison, for up to twenty-four hours prior to the first court appearance.\textsuperscript{120} This detention would only be permissible if the young offender could not be released into the care

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ousely cited resolutions, the JDLs require that juvenile detention and incarceration facilities meet requirements of health and human dignity including, proper food and medical care. \textit{id.} \textit{\textsuperscript{119}} \textsuperscript{31}, \textsuperscript{31}, \textsuperscript{37}, \textsuperscript{49}. The JDLs also require notification of parents or guardians in the event of changes in the juvenile's health status, \textit{id.} \textit{\textsuperscript{56}}, and limitations on the use of force during confinement. \textit{id.} \textit{\textsuperscript{64}}.
\end{quote}

\textit{S. AFR. CONST.} \textit{\textsuperscript{113}} \textsuperscript{28(1)(g)}.  
\textit{\textsuperscript{114}} Section 28(1)(g) stipulates that every child has the right

\begin{quote}
not to be detained except as a measure of last resort, in which case, in addition to the rights a child enjoys under sections 12 and 35, the child may be detained only for the shortest appropriate period of time, and has the right to be –

(i) kept separately from detained persons over the age of 18 years; and

(ii) treated in a manner, and kept in conditions, that take account of the child's age.
\end{quote}

\textit{S. AFR. CONST.} \textit{\textsuperscript{114}} \textsuperscript{50(4)} of Criminal Procedure Act 51 of 1977, \textit{amended by} \textit{\textsuperscript{115}} \textsuperscript{37} of Correctional Services and Supervision Matters Amendment Act 122 of 1991.

\textit{\textsuperscript{115}} \textit{\textsuperscript{Id.}}.

\textit{\textsuperscript{116}} Correctional Services Act 8 of 1959.

\textit{\textsuperscript{117}} Correctional Services Amendment Act 17 of 1994.

\textit{\textsuperscript{118}} Section 29(1) of Correctional Services Act of 1959.


\textit{\textsuperscript{120}} \textit{Id.}
of a parent or guardian.\textsuperscript{121} Section 29(3) of the Correctional Services Amendment Act prohibits the detention of young offenders under eighteen years of age in the same cells as persons over twenty-one years.\textsuperscript{122}

Practical problems impeded the implementation of the child-centered vision embodied in section 29 of the Correctional Services Amendment Act. When section 29 took effect at midnight on May 8, 1995, most of those who would be called on to implement the Act were still unaware of the reform.\textsuperscript{123} In addition, there were few available places of safety.\textsuperscript{124} Courts, unable to remand children to custody, were forced to release them on their own recognizance or in the care of a parent or guardian on the understanding that they would reappear for trial.\textsuperscript{125} Many of the children did not return to court on their trial dates.\textsuperscript{126} Imprecise drafting also hindered the implementation of child-centered goals of section 29. Section 29 prohibits the detention of unconvicted juveniles in police cells or prisons, but does not address the issue of convicted juveniles awaiting sentencing. As a result, children were likely to spend prolonged periods in detention while awaiting sentencing.\textsuperscript{127} Perhaps the most troubling dilemma involved juveniles charged with the commission of serious offenses, as places of safety were not thought to be equipped to hold potentially violent inmates.

The implementation of section 29 also met with widespread public resistance because many perceived the criminal justice system to be soft on escalating violent youth crime. In response to this public outcry, the amendments to section 29\textsuperscript{128} that prohibited the detention of unconvicted juveniles in prisons or police cells were replaced by Act 14 of 1996.\textsuperscript{129} The rights originally given to children in this child-centered statute were severely scaled back.\textsuperscript{130}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{121} Id.
\bibitem{122} Id.
\bibitem{124} Id.
\bibitem{125} Id.
\bibitem{126} Id.
\bibitem{127} Id. at 333.
\bibitem{128} The amendments were introduced by Correctional Services Amendment Act 17 of 1994.
\bibitem{130} Section 29(5)(A) of Correctional Services Amendment Act 14 of 1996 substituted section 29(5) of Correctional Services Amendment Act 17 of 1994 by stating:
In *State v. Williams*, the Constitutional Court contributed to the effort to bring juvenile penal laws into accord with international jurisprudence by declaring judicial corporal punishment to be unconstitutional on the grounds that it is cruel, inhuman, and degrading. By doing so, the Court reinforced the child-centered ideals set out in the Constitution. Following the Constitutional Court decision in *Williams*, Parliament sought to entrench these child-centered ideals by proposing the Abolition of Corporal Punishment

[a] person referred to in subsection (1)(B) who is accused of having committed an offence shall before his or her conviction and sentence, not be detained in a prison or a police cell or lock-up unless the presiding officer has reason to believe that his or her detention is necessary in the interests of the administration of justice and the safety and protection of the public and no secure place of safety, within a reasonable distance from the court, mentioned in section 28 of the Child Care Act, 1983 (Act No. 74 of 1983), is available for his or her detention: Provided that such a person may only be detained in a prison (but not a police cell or lock-up) if he or she is accused of having committed an offence or category of offences mentioned in Schedule 2, or any other offence, in circumstances of such a serious nature as to warrant such detention: Provided further that such a person shall be brought before the court that made the order of such detention every 14 days to enable such court to reconsider the said order.

*Id.* § 29(5)(A). Sections 29(5A)(A) and (B) were inserted by Act 14 of 1996:

(A) In considering whether the interests of the administration of justice and the safety and protection of the public necessitate the detention of a person referred to in subsection (1)(B) in a prison (but not a police cell or lock-up) the presiding officer shall, in addition to any factor which he or she deems necessary, take into account the following factors, namely—

(i) the substantial risk of absconding from a place of safety mentioned in section 28 of the Child Care Act, 1983 (Act No. 74 of 1983);

(ii) the substantial risk of causing harm to other persons awaiting trial in a place of safety; and

(iii) the disposition of the accused to commit offences.

(B) Before the detention of a person in terms of subsection (5) is ordered, oral evidence shall be presented by the State with regard to the factors referred to in paragraph (A).

*Id.* § 29(5A)(A) & B.

Section 29(8) of the Correctional Services Amendment Act, which was also inserted by Act 14 of 1996 provides that "[f]or the purpose of this section, an unconvicted person shall be construed as a person who has not been convicted or sentenced." *Id.* § 29(8)


132. *Id.* at 658.
Bill,\textsuperscript{133} the aim of which is to repeal all laws that still provide for judicial corporal punishment. On November 6, 1996, the South African Schools Act,\textsuperscript{134} which contains a prohibition of corporal punishment in schools, was enacted. Nonetheless, there is opposition to making corporal punishment unconstitutional from those like David Benatar who suggest that judicial corporal punishment may not \textit{necessarily} be cruel or unjust or excessively degrading.\textsuperscript{135} Corporal punishment in the home and in schools continues to be practiced. As with the struggle over confinement, this debate over corporal punishment demonstrates some of the practical obstacles to full implementation of the Constitution's child-centered approach. While not to be disregarded, such obstacles may be overcome by structural changes and educational programs.

\section*{C. The Child's Right to Legal Representation}

Employing a child-centered approach, section 28(1)(h) of the Constitution protects a child's right to legal representation.\textsuperscript{136} The 1996 amendments to section 8 of the Child Care Act were meant to implement this innovation.\textsuperscript{137} Under subsection 8A(1) of the amended Act, a child is entitled to legal representation at any stage of the proceedings under the Act.\textsuperscript{138} Subsection 8A(2) of the amended Act requires a children's court to inform children, at the commencement of any proceedings, that they have the right to request legal representation at any stage of the proceedings.\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{133}Abolition of Corporal Punishment Bill 20 of 1997.

\textsuperscript{134}South African Schools Act 84 of 1996. Section 10 of that Act provides that "no person may administer corporal punishment at a school to a learner[, and][a]ny person who contravenes subsection (1) is guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a sentence which could be imposed for assault." \textit{Id.} \textsection{10}.

\textsuperscript{135}David Benatar, \textit{The Child, the Rod and the Law}, 1996 \textit{ACTA JURIDICA} 197.

\textsuperscript{136}Section 28(1)(h) provides that every child has the right "to have a legal practitioner assigned to the child by the state, and at state expense, in civil proceedings affecting the child, if substantial injustice would otherwise result." \textit{S. AFR. CONST.} \textsection{28(1)(h)}.

This section furthers the objectives of section 37(d) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that state parties shall ensure that

\begin{quote}
[e]very Child deprived of his or her liberty shall have the right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance, as well as the right to challenge the legality of the deprivation of his or her liberty before a court or other competent, independent and impartial authority, and to a prompt decision on any such action.
\end{quote}

\textit{U.N. Convention, supra} note 9, art. 37(d).

\textsuperscript{137}\textsection{2} of Child Care Amendment Act 96 of 1996.

\textsuperscript{138}\textsection{8A(1)} of Child Care Act 74 of 1983.

\textsuperscript{139}\textsection{8A(2)} of Child Care Act 74 of 1983.
This statute does not realize fully the Constitutional guarantee of legal representation for children. First, the child's right to counsel appears to be limited to child care proceedings because the court is not obliged to extend the right to legal representation to the child in cases that do not come under the Child Care Act. Second, the provision fails to address adequately the practical problems that may arise during implementation. For example, a child may be incapable of understanding or instructing counsel. The Statute does not define clearly what the responsibility of the Children's Court is when a child makes a frivolous request for legal representation. The court could deny such a request; likewise, the court could insist that the child's best interests require legal representation despite a refusal. One reading of section 8A(4) of the amended Act suggests that there is no such obligation on the children's court in such situations. Third, it is clear that, in operation, the child's legal representation is discretionary on the part of Commissioners of Child Welfare. Finally, this provision may undermine the child's autonomy and create potential conflict of interests, particularly "where parents (who may be akin to defendants in a removal enquiry) are empowered to appoint a legal representative for the child." The 1996 amendments to the Child Care Act have been hailed as a welcome innovation because Child Welfare Commissioners are empowered to arrange child legal representation in appropriate cases. It is important to note, however, that the amendments may not result in increased child representation in the Children's Court, due to the emphasis on cost and the fact that the child's right to legal representation is essentially at the discretion of the Child Welfare


141. See Zaal, supra note 140, at 336; see also Sloth-Nielsen & Van Heerden, supra note 140, at 650.

142. § 8A(4) of Child Care Act 74 of 1983. The section states that "[a] children's court may, at the commencement of a proceeding or at any stage of the proceeding, order that legal representation be provided for a child at the expense of the state, should the children's court consider it to be in the best interest of such child." Id.

143. See Zaal, supra note 140, at 335–36; see also Sloth-Nielsen & Van Heerden, supra note 140, at 650. Subsection 8A(3) is worthy of note in that it empowers the children's court to approve "that a parent may appoint a legal practitioner for his or her child for any proceeding under this Act, should the children's court consider it to be in the best interest of such child." Id. § 8A(3).

144. Sloth-Nielsen & Van Heerden, supra note 140, at 650.
The amendments clearly do not render completely operational the child-centered norm expressed in section 28(1)(h).

D. The Right to Be Protected from Exploitative Labor Practices

1. The Problem of Child Labor

Child labor is fairly common in poor countries, and South Africa is no exception. South Africa has been systematically underdeveloped by successive apartheid policies. A majority of the population still lives in abject poverty. In South Africa, largely among the underclasses where children are considered to be an economic resource, there are strong economic constraints against eliminating child labor, powerful vested interests in maintaining the current state of affairs, and widespread cultural and legal support for the use of children's work. South African indigenous law and common law both recognize a child's duty to provide support for indigent parents. Though fairly common, child labor remains hidden from public view. It tends to be intermittent and to take place in the informal sector (including domestic work and family business enterprises).

146. A. Bequele, Combating Child Labor, 10 CONDITIONS WORK DIG. 7, 8 (1991).
149. See, e.g., BOBERG, supra note 4, at 267–70, 273 n.81. The South African courts tend to interpret the indigence requirement strictly. Id. at 310–12. Boberg suggests that a less strict interpretation be placed upon the requirement of indigence when it is necessary to found a dependant's action against a third party. A stricter interpretation should be applied where the duty of support is necessary to found a claim for maintenance by a parent against a child because neither has wronged the other and the court must strike a balance between the needs of the parties and their respective resources. Id.
150. In one discussion of the implementation of international labor standards, H. T. Dao states that the national provisions frequently fall short of international standards because they do not reach into the sectors where children are actually working. H.T. Dao, International Labour Standards and Their Implementations, 10 CONDITIONS WORK DIG. 57, 68 (1991).

In one case concerning Convention No. 138, the minimum age provisions only cover industrial undertakings.... In one case related to Convention No. 138, family undertakings are exempted from the legal provisions on minimum age.... In a case relating to the application of Convention No. 77, it has been found that undertakings employing less than 20 workers are not covered in one country.... Industrial homeworkers and persons in domestic service are
2. Legislative Interventions

The final Constitution, together with national legislation, set minimum standards for child labor. Many South African children are employed at low wages with no benefits and are expected to perform various harmful tasks.\footnote{151} Subsections 28(1)(e) and (f) of the Constitution,\footnote{152} which address the problem of child labor and the economic exploitation of children, incorporate the child-centered ideals of article 23 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.\footnote{153} Children are provided with constitutional protection against exploitative and unfair labor practices that require children to perform work or provide services that are age inappropriate or that place their well-being; education; physical or mental health; or their spiritual, moral, or social development at risk.\footnote{154} 

exempted from the relevant provisions in two cases concerning respectively Convention No. 138 (minimum age) and Convention No. 78 (medical examination in non-industrial occupations)\ldots Relevant national provisions are frequently not applicable to persons who work outside an employment relationship in cases related to Convention No. 138 on minimum age (seven cases) and Convention No. 58 on minimum age for employment at sea (one case).

\textit{id.}

151. \textit{BOSMANSWANEPOEL \& WESSELS}, \textit{supra} note 18, at 82.
152. \textit{S. AFR. CONST. § 28(1)(e), (f)}.
153. \textit{U.N. Convention, supra} note 9, art. 32. Article 23 reads:

(1) States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

(2) States Parties shall take legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to ensure that implementation of the present article. To this end, and having regard to the relevant provisions of other international instruments, States Parties shall in particular:

(a) Provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment;

(b) Provide for appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment;

(c) Provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of the present article.

154. \textit{S. AFR. CONST. § 28(1)(e), (f)}. The Constitution recognizes that each child has the right to be "protected from exploitative labor practices; [each child also has the right] not to be required or permitted to perform work or provide services that\ldots are inappropriate for a person of that child’s age\ldots or place at risk the child’s well-
The terms of subsections 28(1)(e) and (f) are enforced through various pieces of national legislation, including Chapter 6 of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. Chapter 6 prohibits the employment of children of school-going age (under fifteen). Section 49 of the same bill prohibits all forced labor. Section 52A of the Child Care Act prohibits the employment of children under fifteen. Section 111 of the Merchant Shipping Act prohibits the employment of a person under eighteen as a trimmer or fireman on a ship. Section 12 of the Security Officers Act prohibits the employment of persons under eighteen as security officers. Section 32(1) of the Minerals Act prohibits the employment of children under sixteen underground in any mine.

At least for the present in South Africa, child labor is a fact of life that many accept. A blanket prohibition simply does not reflect reality. The Minister may, by publishing a notice, prevent any employment from being prohibited. Employment of children in the advertising industry is exempted. Once again, child-centered norms are forced to conform to reflect the reality of law and society in South Africa.

3. The Limits of Legislative Interventions

Legislative intervention provides a limited and ineffective response to a hidden and pervasive problem such as child labor. Labor laws are designed essentially to regulate the formal sector, where both strict regulation and monitoring are feasible. However, because most children are employed in the informal sector, labor laws can only be one part of an effective response to this problem.

being, education, physical or mental health or spiritual, moral or social development.” Id.
155. The provisions of subsections 28(1)(e) and (f) of the Constitution must be read in conjunction with section 23(1), which provides that “[e]veryone has the right to fair labor practices.” S. AF. CONST. § 23(1). Section 13 protects everyone, including children, against slavery, servitude, or forced labor. Id. § 13.
157. Id.
158. Id. § 49.
159. § 52A of Child Care Act 74 of 1983.
160. § 111 of Merchant Shipping Act 57 of 1951.
163. Angelo Pantazis, Children’s Rights, in CONSTITUTIONAL LAW OF SOUTH AFRICA 33-10 (Chaskalson et al. eds., 1996).
164. § 17 of Basic Conditions of Employment Act 3 of 1983; Pantazis, supra note 163, at 33-10.
The task of eliminating child labor is complicated by the widespread cultural support for child labor and public indifference to the problem. Constitutional and legislative interventions that prohibit child labor are criticized as providing a Western response to an African problem. It is argued that the protection of children from economic exploitation by international law is dictated by Western legal concepts and that subsections 28(1)(e) and (f) of the Constitution, in protecting children from exploitative labor practices, incorporate the language of international law. It is also argued that subsections 28(1)(e) and (f) reflect the individualist values of an industrialized society and that they conflict with the more communal African tradition. It is further argued that the Constitution undermines family autonomy in that it gives children rights without stating their obligations to their families. It is also contended that the fiscal and economic challenges facing an underdeveloped economy such as South Africa's are not taken into account.

165. See BENNETT, supra note 13, at 98 (asserting that the children's rights movement has embraced Western norms). It is clear that the fight against child labor originated in Western industrialized nations and that it has evolved there as well. Boyden & Rialp, supra note 148, at 187–88.

166. Bennett identifies two significant international norms in section 30 of the interim Constitution. "A 'child' is deemed to be a person under the age of 18 years[,] ... and in all matters concerning children their best interests are the paramount consideration." BENNETT, supra note 13, at 100.

167. Bennett looks at a number of the conflicts that arise between communal African tradition and the individualist values enshrined in the Constitution in a section entitled, "Implication of Fundamental Rights for Customary Law." Id. at 101–12.

168. Bennett notes that although children are granted rights upon which parents cannot infringe, parents are still responsible for raising and caring for children. Id. Du Plessis and Corder point out that "the right to parental care is a constitutional right of the child. Nowhere in chapter 3 is any parental right (or a right to family life) proclaimed." DU PLESSIS & CORDER, supra note 50, at 186.

169. Davis, supra note 64, at 479. Eliminating child labor in South Africa will be costly. See Boyden & Rialp, supra note 148, at 210–19.

The way in which children are reared in South Africa is all too often dictated by poverty. A prevalent and unhappy reality, poverty has the unfortunate effect of distorting the application of constitutional rights. Children from affluent backgrounds can expect to undergo a lengthy period of education before moving out into the world. In contrast, poorer children must, for the sake of survival, begin work at the earliest possible age. What constitutes neglect of a child in a wealthy family, therefore, would almost certainly not be neglect in a family subsisting on the poverty datum line. The Constitution has no provisions, however, that would permit such economic cleavages to influence the interpretation/limitation of fundamental rights. [Section 36] allows limitation only by laws of general application . . . .
with so much poverty, is it reasonable to expect children not to work?

Contrary to popular perceptions, child labor is not economically efficient. Children tend to be employed in the informal sector at low wages and under exploitative conditions. Their work tends to be marginal, intermittent, and casual. Children tend to consume more than they earn. To combat child labor successfully, the government, as King suggests, must couple law with politics and economics by forming alliances with non-governmental, voluntary, and grassroots organizations. It also will have to provide assistance to families so as to reduce their reliance on child labor. The constitutional protection and subsequent legislation are not enough to end a well-established practice that, to some extent, has been protected by the parent-centered legal structure of South Africa. The subject of child labor law presents another illustration of the difficulties involved in imposing child-centered norms on South Africa.

E. The Right to a Name and Nationality from Birth

The Constitution protects a child’s “right . . . to a name and nationality from birth.” The child’s right to a name and nationality, and the right to have his or her name and other basic family information registered, comprise a child’s right to a legal identity. The child’s right to a legal identity also should be viewed as an extension of the child’s right to human dignity, which is articulated in section 10 of the Constitution and is a non-derogable right. Every child has a right to know of his or her origins. The right to an identity has important psychological and emotional content because a name connects a child to his or her family.

1. Name

The right to a name contained in section 28(1)(a) of the Constitution incorporates some basic principles from articles 7(1) and

BENNETT, supra note 13, at 101 (citations omitted); see also WILLEM SCHURINK ET AL., CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, EXPLORING SOME DIMENSIONS OF CHILD LABOUR IN SOUTH AFRICA (1997).

170. See VAN BUEREN, supra note 98, at 263–64.

171. King, supra note 48, at 45-48; see also Boyden & Rialp, supra note 148, at 184 (asserting that the government’s challenge is to create and sustain coalitions against child labor).


173. Id. § 10.

174. U.N. Convention, supra note 9, art. 7(1). Article 7(1) of the Convention provides that “[t]he child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the
8(1)\textsuperscript{75} of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. While these principles also are spelled out in the Births and Deaths Registrations Act of 1992,\textsuperscript{176} this Act also reinforces patriarchal ideology. For example, section 9(2) provides that, where the child is born in wedlock, registration will be "under the surname of the father of the child concerned."\textsuperscript{177} Section 10(1), dealing with the registration of a child born out of wedlock, provides that "[n]otice of birth of a child born out of wedlock shall be given . . . under the surname of the mother."\textsuperscript{178} These provisions discriminate unfairly against those born out of wedlock by denying them ties with their fathers\textsuperscript{179} and conflict with the gender equality provision contained in section 9(3) of the Constitution.\textsuperscript{180}

The constitutional right to have a name at birth has important implications for adopted children’s searches for their parents’ identities. This situation is especially true for adopted children whose racial and cultural identity differs from that of their adoptive parents.\textsuperscript{181} Section 25 of the Child Care Act permits an adopted child’s right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents." \textit{Id.}

175. \textit{U.N. Convention, supra} note 9, art. 8(1). Article 8(1) of the Convention provides that "States parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference." \textit{Id.}

176. Births and Deaths Registration Act 51 of 1992. Section 9(6) of the Act provides that “[n]o person’s birth shall be registered unless a forename and a surname have been assigned to him.” \textit{Id.} \S 9(6).

177. \textit{Id.} \S 9(2).

178. \textit{Id.} \S 10(1).


180. S. AFR. CONST. \S 9(3). In \textit{Fraser v. Children’s Court}, 1997 (2) SA 261 (CC), the court decided that section 18(4)(d) of the Child Care Act, which denied unwed fathers the right to consent to the adoption of their children, was unconstitutional to the extent that it discriminated unfairly between wed and unwed fathers. Though the \textit{Fraser} decision is cast in terms of parental rights, it implies that similar discrimination between legitimate and illegitimate children violates the Constitution’s equality provision. For a comment on the \textit{Fraser} decision, see Mosikatsana, \textit{supra} note 179, at 164.

surname at birth to be changed to that of the adoptive parent or parents. Unless special provision is made under national legislation for accessing the birth records of adoptees, section 25 can operate to undermine the rights of adoptees to know of their legal identity at birth. Some commentators argue that adopted children who are denied information about their birth parents are being denied peace of mind and mental health.

The Child Care Act makes information regarding an adopted child's identity at birth more readily available than it has been under previous legislation. The child's constitutional right to a name at birth should be interpreted to prevent adoptees' rights to their birth records from being subject to ministerial discretion. Constitutionization of this issue would help mitigate health consequences to the adopted child and maintain the protection afforded birth parents by the current discretionary system because the adoptees' rights must be limited by the birth parents' rights to privacy, contained in section 14 of the Constitution.

D.J. Joubert, *Interracial Adoptions: Can We Learn from the Americans?*, 110 S. Afr. L.J. 726 (1993) (acknowledging that cultural differences in transracial adoptions should be considered but should not be conclusory).

§ 25 of Child Care Act 74 of 1983.

Ingrid Baer, *Adoptees Searching for their Origins*, in PARENTHOOD IN MODERN SOCIETY 241, 243 n.5, 244 n.6 (John Eekelaar & Peter Šarcevic eds., 1993) (discussing the importance to adoptees of learning about their origins); see also Jonathan Klaaren, *Access to Information*, in CONSTITUTIONAL LAW OF SOUTH AFRICA 24–1 (Matthew Chaskalson et al. eds., 1996) (arguing generally that people should have a right of access to information except in very few circumstances).

The strongest argument, although not the only argument, for the right of the child to access to genetic history is that such access minimizes genealogical bewilderment, as the process of identification with others can be incorporated into the self-image. Genealogical bewilderment may occur where children either do not have any knowledge of their biological parents or possess only uncertain knowledge... [t]he resulting state of confusion and uncertainty 'fundamentally under-mines' children's sense of security, thus affecting their mental health. ... [w]ithout knowing about one's origins and genealogy it is difficult if not impossible to understand one's characteristics and potential. In the case of adopted children, this extends to two sets of genealogies. By denying access there would appear to be an implied challengeable assumption that adopted children have less need than others to know their genealogical make-up.


§ 14. S. Afr. Const. See David McQuoid-Mason, *Privacy*, in CONSTITUTIONAL LAW OF SOUTH AFRICA, supra note 183, at 18-1, 18-7 (arguing that privacy rights permit individuals to make important life decisions without state interference); see
2. Nationality

The protection of the child's right to nationality has a special significance for South Africa. The apartheid State denied Black children a common citizenship with Whites and relegated them to second class citizenship through racist, non-child-centered legislation. The forced removal and homeland policies assigned Black children to a homeland on the basis of their ethnic and tribal origin. The political rationale for the homeland policy was to deny Blacks citizenship rights in the country of their birth. Articles 7 and 8 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child obligates South Africa to provide a common citizenship for all and to eradicate past discriminatory practices.

Section 3(1) of the Constitution incorporates the provisions of articles 7 and 8 of the UN Convention by providing for a common citizenship for all South Africans. Section 3(2) provides that all South African citizens are "equally entitled to the rights, privileges, and benefits of citizenship; and equally subject to the duties and responsibilities of citizenship." Section 3(3) of the Constitution states that "[n]ational legislation must provide for the acquisition, loss and restoration of citizenship." The South African Citizenship Act, which was enacted pursuant to section 3(3) of the Constitution, provides for the acquisition of South African citizenship by birth or descent.

also Van Bueren, supra note 183, at 44–45 (arguing that the privacy rights of children should be considered in addition to the rights of adults).


186. U.N. Convention, supra note 9, arts. 7, 8.
187. S. AFR. CONST. § 3(1).
188. Id. § 3(2) (emphasis added).
189. Id. § 3(3).
191. Id. Section 2 confers South African citizenship on any person who acquired South African citizenship by birth prior to the commencement of the Act; who is born in the Republic on or after the commencement of the Act; or who is born outside the Republic and one or both of his parents, or his mother if he is born out of wedlock, was at the time of his birth in the service of the Government of the Republic was a representative or employee of an employer resident in the Republic, or was in the service of an international organization of which the Government of the Republic was a member. Id. § 2.

Section 3 confers South African citizenship by descent on any person who, immediately prior to the commencement of the Act, was a South African citizen by descent; or who is born outside the Republic on or after the commencement of the
The Constitution and the South African Citizenship Act use the term "citizen."¹⁹² Section 28(1)(a) of the Constitution, which borrows heavily from the U N Convention on the Rights of the Child, uses the term "nationality."¹⁹³ The difference has no policy implications. The terms "nationality" and "citizenship" may be used interchangeably because in practice they refer to the same notion.¹⁹⁴ "Nationality" is an international law term which describes the legal relationship between a state and an individual for purposes of international relations, whereas "citizenship" is a constitutional law term that describes the legal relationship between a state and an individual for the purposes of their internal relations.¹⁹⁵

F. Section 28(1)(b): The Right to Family Care, Parental Care, or Appropriate Alternative Care When Removed from the Family Environment

Section 30(1)(b) of the interim Constitution provided for the child's right to "parental care,"¹⁹⁶ however, it was unclear whether the right to parental care included the child's right to be cared for by the extended family or to foster care or adoption.¹⁹⁷ Section 28(1)(b) of the final Constitution resolves this ambiguity by making specific reference to the child's right "to family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family envi-

¹⁹². Id.; S. AFR. CONST. §§ 3, 19, 20, 21, 22, 47, 174, 193. But see § 28 (using "nationality").
¹⁹³. S. AFR. CONST. § 28(1)(a).
¹⁹⁴. In practice, the terms usually are used interchangeably because those persons with the citizenship of a particular state usually hold that state's nationality. A distinction between the terms sometimes was made in a colonial context whenever a colonial power was not prepared to afford all its subjects equal status. In South African law, however, no distinction is made between citizenship and nationality. All South African citizens also have South African nationality. The reference to nationality in the provision on children's rights has no practical implications. I.M. RAUTENBACH & E. F. J. MALHERBE, CONSTITUTIONAL LAW 43, 43-44 (2d ed. 1996).
¹⁹⁶. S. AFR. CONST. § 30(1)(b) (1993) ("Every child shall have the right... to parental care . . . ").
¹⁹⁷. Mosikatsana, supra note 28, at 130-31; see also Mosikatsana, supra note 179, at 163.
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1. Family Care

The right to “family care” includes the right to be cared for by the extended family. The South African common law and statute recognized only the nuclear family. For example, in *Bethell v. Bland,* the maternal grandfather brought an application for the custody of a child born out of wedlock whose mother was still a minor. The paternal grandparents brought a counter application, and the natural father intervened. In his decision Judge Wunsh referred to the natural father and the maternal and paternal grandparents as third parties or outsiders who lacked an inherent right to the custody of the child. However, it was found that the biological relationship and genetic factors placed the natural father in a favorable position over other “outsiders.”

Though the right to family care is framed in child-centered terms, it comports with a fundamental norm of indigenous law: recognition of the extended family. The inclusion of the extended family under the right to “family care” in section 28(1)(b) of the Constitution is a welcome improvement, and it is consistent with current law reform efforts aimed at including the extended family in providing for the child’s welfare. Acknowledging that the common law position of granting the parents exclusive rights of access is

198. S. AFR. CONST. § 28(1)(b).
200. 1996 (2) SA 194 (W).
201. *Id.* at 196.
202. *Id.*
203. *Id.* at 209.
204. *Id.*
205. This has been articulated by T.W. Bennett:

   In certain instances construction of a basic right in terms of African cultural norms would not amount to a limitation, but rather to an extension. The word “parental,” for instance, as understood by the common law, normally denotes a child’s biological father and mother. In the African system of kinship and family relations, however, “parental” might include more remote kinfolk, who for social purposes are classified as playing parental roles, an interpretation that has the effect of widening a child’s support network.

206. *Id.* at 96.
not always in the best interests of the child,207 the Law Commission has proposed draft legislation granting the extended family the right to seek access to the child through the courts.208 The right to family care demonstrates the possibility of implementing the Constitution's child-centered norms through traditional legal forms.

2. Parental Care

The right to parental care includes the child's right to be cared for by both natural parents. Most legislation209 and judicial prece-


208. The legislation would provide the following:

(1) If a grandparent of a minor child is denied access to the child by the person who has parental authority over the child, such grandparent may apply to court for an order granting him or her access to the child and the court may grant the application on such conditions as the court thinks fit.

(2) Any other person who alleges that there exists between him or her and a minor child any particular family tie or relationship which makes it desirable in the interest of the child that he or she should have access to the child, may, if such access is denied by the person who has parental authority over the child, apply to court for an order granting him or her access to the child and the court may grant such application on such conditions as the court thinks fit.

(3) The court shall not grant access to a minor child as contemplated in subsection (1) or (2) unless the court is satisfied that it is in the best interest of the child.

(4) For the purposes of subsection (1) or (2) the court may refer any application to the Family Advocate referred to in section 1 of the Mediation in Certain Divorce Matters Act, 1987 (Act No. 24 van 1987), for investigation and recommendation.

(5) The provisions of section 4(3) of the Mediation in Certain Divorce Matters Act, 1987 (Act No. 24 van 1987), shall mutatis mutandis apply with regard to proceedings concerning the application by grandparents or other interested persons for access to a minor child as contemplated in this section.


209. For example, section 3 of the Children's Status Act, which provides for the guardianship of and custody of children born out of wedlock, provides

(1) If the mother of an extra-marital child is unmarried and a minor—
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... does not protect the child's right to be cared for by both natural parents if the parents are unwed or married according to the tenets of a non-Christian religion. The common law rule, which denies fathers inherent rights of access to their children on the basis of gender and marital status, is inconsistent with section 9(3) of the Constitution. The rule denies children born out of wedlock or in non-Christian marriages access to their natural fathers, which amounts to discrimination on the basis of the circumstances of a person's birth under the Constitution.

In an effort to bring the common law position in line with the equality provisions of the Constitution, Parliament has passed the Natural Fathers of Children Born out of Wedlock Act 86 of 1997. Section 2 of the Act deals with "[a]ccess to and custody and guardianship of children born out of wedlock by natural fathers." Discrimination against fathers in non-Christian marriages on religious

(a) the guardianship of that child shall, unless a competent court directs otherwise, vest in the guardian of that mother;

(b) the custody of that child shall, unless a competent court directs otherwise, vest in that mother.

(2) If the mother of an extra-marital child is under the age of 21 years but acquires the status of a major, the guardianship and custody of that child shall, unless a competent court directs otherwise, vest in that mother.

§ 3 of Children's Status Act 82 of 1987.

Section 18(4)(d) of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 denied an unwed father the right to consent to the adoption of his child. In the Fraser case, the Constitutional Court declared this provision to be unconstitutional. Fraser v. Children's Court, 1997 (2) SA 261, 263 (CC). For a commentary, see Mosikatsana, supra note 179, at 152.

210. See, e.g., B. v. S. 1995 (3) SA 571 (A) (noting that the law does not accord fathers' access to their illegitimate children); S. v. S. 1993 (2) SA 200 (W) (declaring that, in the absence of official interference with parental authority, the mother has exclusive parental authority over her child born out of wedlock); B. v. P. 1991 (4) SA 113 (T) (stating that the father of an illegitimate child must show compelling reasons why he should be granted right of access to the child); F. v. B. 1988 (3) SA 948 (D) (holding that the father of a child born out of wedlock has no right of access to his child even if the parents had been living together at the time of birth); W. v. S. 1988 (1) SA 475 (N) (holding that the father of an illegitimate child has no prima facie right of access to the child); F. v. L. 1987 (4) SA 525 (W) (holding that a father of an illegitimate child has no parental authority and no right of access to the child). But see Van Erk v. Holmer, 1992 (2) SA 636 (W) (holding that the best interests of the child dictate equal treatment for fathers of legitimate and illegitimate children).

211. See, e.g., Chodree v. Vally 1996 (2) SA 28 (W) (noting that the father of a child not born of a marriage recognized by civil law had no inherent right of access to the child).

212. S. Afr. Const. § 9(3); see also supra text accompanying note 180.

213. S. Afr. Const. § 9(3).


215. Id. § 2.
grounds is contrary to section 15(1) of the Constitution.216 Section 15(1) eliminates any legal basis for the discrimination between fathers in Christian marriages and fathers in non-Christian marriages.217 Section 15(3) enables parliament to pass legislation authorizing the recognition of non-Christian marriages.218 Exercising this power, Parliament has introduced the Births and Deaths Registration Amendment Act, which was assented to on August 29, 1996, and took effect on September 5, 1996.219 The Act amends the principal Act in section 1 so as to define “child born out of wedlock” and to make provision for the recognition of customary unions and non-Christian marriages.220 Similarly, section 1(d) of the Child Care Amendment Act has amended the definition of marriage to include customary unions and non-Christian marriages,221 and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act222 also has extended the definition of family to include “the employee’s spouse or any other person who cohabits with the employee [and] the employee’s parent, adoptive parent, grandparent, child, adopted child, grandchild or sibling.”223 In Fraser v. Children’s Court,224 Judge Mahomed noted that the discrimination against fathers in non-Christian marriages is no longer valid.225

The right to parental care is the child’s right, not the parents’ right.226 Where the parents are married according to a civil or Christian marriage, some legislative attempt has been made at recognizing parental rights through the notion of joint parental responsibility.227 Parenting rights and the right to family life have not been constitutionalized in South Africa. There is no provision in the South African Constitution like section 14(3) of the Namibian Constitution,

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216. “Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, and opinion.” S. AFR. CONST. § 15(1).
217. Id.
218. Id. § 15(3).
220. Id.
221. § 1(d) Child Care Amendment Act 96 of 1996.
223. Id. § 28(5).
224 Fraser v. Children’s Court, 1997 (2) SA 261 (CC).
225. Id. at 273.
226. DU PLESSIS & CORDER, supra note 50, at 186.
227. For example, section 1(1) of the Guardianship Act 192 of 1993 grants both parents equal rights to the guardianship of their children. Sections 6(3) of the Divorce Act 70 of 1979 and 5(1) of the Matrimonial Affairs Act, as amended by section 16 of the Divorce Act, empower the courts to grant joint custody orders where appropriate. For an interpretation of these provisions where joint custody was denied, see Pinion v. Pinion, 1994 (2) SA 725 (D); Schlebusch v. Schlebusch, 1988 (4) SA 548 (E). For an interpretation where joint custody was granted, see Venton v. Venton, 1993 (1) SA 763 (D); Kastan v. Kastan, 1985 (3) SA 235 (C) (granting joint custody).
which provides for the protection of the family as the basic unit of society.\textsuperscript{228} The constitutional protection of the right to family life creates obstacles to State intervention on behalf of children and women who are being abused, and interferes with the goals of a child-centered approach.

3. Alternative Care

The right to alternative care includes the right of a child to adoptive, foster, or institutional care.

\textit{a. Adoptions}

The child's right to adoptive care is provided for in section 20 of the Child Care Act.\textsuperscript{229} Section 20 provides that, upon adoption, the adoptive child becomes the lawful child of the adoptive parents as though the child had been born to those parents during a lawful marriage.\textsuperscript{230} The right should be viewed as the child's right to be cared for by the adoptive parents and not as the prospective adoptive parents' right to adopt; however, the right has not always been interpreted in this manner.

In \textit{Fraser}, the mother of an extra-marital child arranged for the child's adoption before the child was born.\textsuperscript{231} Mr. Fraser, the child's natural father, brought an unsuccessful application in the Witwatersrand Local Division of the High Court to prevent the adoption from proceeding.\textsuperscript{232} On appeal to the Constitutional Court, Judge Mahomed declared that section 18(4)(d) of the Child Care Act, which denied unwed fathers the right to consent to or veto the adoption of their natural children, was unconstitutional because it discriminated unfairly against unwed fathers on the basis of their gender and marital status.\textsuperscript{233}

The Constitutional Court decision in \textit{Fraser} was parent-centered and only addressed the competing property interests that the natural parents had in their natural child. Judge Mahomed did not consider what was in the child's best interests. Section 28(2) of the Constitution instructs that "[a] child's best interest is of paramount importance in

\textsuperscript{229} § 20 of Child Care Act 74 of 1983.
\textsuperscript{230} \textit{Id.} § 20. \textit{See} BOSMAN-SWANEPOEL \& WESSELS, \textit{supra} note 18, at 56–57.
\textsuperscript{231} Fraser v. Children's Court, 1997 (2) SA 261, 266 (CC).
\textsuperscript{232} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{233} \textit{Id.} at 273–74; \textit{see} Mosikatsana, \textit{supra} note 179, at 152.
every matter concerning the child." Thus, the child's right to adoptive care should not be subordinated to the potentially competing property interests of the natural parents in their child, as happened in *Fraser.* This decision is another demonstration of the unwillingness among many in South Africa to embrace a child-centered approach.

**b. Foster Care**

Section 15(b) of the Child Care Act provides for the placement of children into foster care. Section 290(1)(b) of the Criminal Procedure Act provides for the placement of convicted juveniles in foster care. This legislation creates the basis for recognizing a child's right to foster care.

It is conceivable that there may be situations where a foster parent and child may form a psychological bond or where continued foster care would be in the child's best interest. This situation would usually occur when the foster child is a member of the family or where the foster child has been in care for an extensive period of time. Section 18(4)(g) of the Child Care Act mandates the approval of any adoption of a foster child by the foster parents, who in some cases are the only "psychological parents" some children have. Such a statement shall be dispensed with if it is not forthcoming within a month. The requirement for such a statement is merely a gesture of courtesy, as no child shall be excluded from adoption under circumstances where adoption would be in the child's best interests. It could be argued that some foster parents may invoke their due process rights contained in section 33 of the Constitution in

235. 1997 (2) SA at 273-74.
236. § 15(b) of Child Care Act 74 of 1983.
237. § 290(1)(b), (d) of Criminal Procedure Act 51 of 1977. See Bosman-Swaynepoel & Wessels, supra note 18, at 44-45.
238. § 18(4)(g) of Child Care Act 74 of 1983. The section reads:

A children's court to which application for an order of adoption is made . . . shall not grant the application unless it is satisfied . . . in the case of an application for the adoption of a foster child by a person other than his foster parent, that the foster parent consented in writing to the adoption of the child: Provided that such consent shall not be necessary if the foster parent refuses or fails, within one month after being called upon in writing by an assistant of the children's court to do so, to indicate to him in writing whether he so consents or not.

Id.

239. Bosman-Swaynepoel & Wessels, supra note 18, at 53.
asserting the right "not to be deprived by state action of the care of a child with whom they have established a stable relationship 'except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.' "

In the United States of America, the courts have not been consistent in deciding whether to accord due process protections to foster parents before allowing the removal of the child by welfare officials, even where there was a family bond between foster parent and child. In Smith v. Organization of Foster Families for Equality and Reform, the court decided, without determining whether the foster care relationship created a constitutionally protected liberty interest, that New York procedures were adequate to protect whatever liberty interest the foster parents might have. Several U.S. courts have decided that there is no constitutionally protected liberty interest in the relationship between a child and his or her foster parents. Consequently, due process need not be fulfilled before a state welfare agency removes the child from the foster home. However, in Rivera v. Marcus, the court stated that:

there would appear to be instances in which a liberty interest should be recognized where long-term family relationships evolve out of foster home placements. It seems clear that, as with a biological parent and child, strong, loving, emotional and psychological ties can develop among members of a long-term foster family.


242. Id. at 855. The Smith court stated:

Finally, the § 392 hearing is available to foster parents, both in and outside New York City, even where the removal sought is for the purpose of returning the child to his natural parents. Since this remedy provides a sufficient constitutional pre-removal hearing to protect whatever liberty interest might exist in the continued existence of the foster family when the State seeks to transfer the child to another foster home, a fortiori the procedure is adequate to protect the lesser interest of the foster family in remaining together at the expense of the disruption of the natural family.

Id.; see also Sherrard v. Owens, 484 F. Supp. 728, 742 (W.D. Mich. 1980), aff'd 644 F. 2d 542 (6th Cir. 1981) (finding that Michigan procedures for revoking home licenses were constitutionally adequate because there is no liberty right connected to the operation of a foster home).

243. A right to due process was denied in Drummond v. Fulton County Dep't of Family, 563 F.2d 1200 (5th Cir. 1977); see also Kyees v. County Dep't of Pub. Welfare, 600 F.2d 693 (7th Cir. 1979).

244. 533 F. Supp. 203 (D. Conn. 1982).
Any arbitrary state interference with those ties surely can result in harsh and lasting consequences to the foster child and to the foster family members. In these special circumstances, it would seem that a preremoval hearing which comports with constitutional standards may be required.245

The decision in Rivera parallels section 18(4)(g) of the Child Care Act. It tempers parental rights with a child-centered approach that favors taking the child from the foster parents and placing him or her in another home, if that is in the child’s best interests.

c. Institutional Care

Where a child cannot be placed with an adoptive or foster family, he or she will be placed in a state institution. A child’s right to institutional care when removed from the family environment is protected in pre-constitutional legislation. Subsections 15(c) and (d) of the Child Care Act provide for the placement of children into institutional care.246 Section 290(d) of the Criminal Procedure Act provides for the placement of convicted juveniles in institutional care, as provided in the Child Care Act.247

The right to family, parental, and alternative care recognizes the importance of the family in meeting the needs of children. In South Africa, as in most Western countries, experience has shown that the family may be far from ideal. Unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, addiction, criminality, and family breakdown combine to create a situation where children are more likely to be abused.248 Section 28(1)(d) of the Constitution protects children from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation.249 This constitutional protection gives added support to legislation that protects a child’s right to alternative care when removed from his or her family.

G. The Right to Be Protected from Maltreatment, Neglect, Abuse, or Degradation

Section 28(1)(d) of the Constitution, granting children the right “to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degrada-
tion,\textsuperscript{250} is derived from article 19(1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.\textsuperscript{251} Article 19(1) requires that

States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.\textsuperscript{252}

Reports of the sexual abuse of children in South Africa have increased.\textsuperscript{253} On March 17, 1997, President Mandela listened to children’s concerns on the Felicia Mabuza-Suttle Talk Show.\textsuperscript{254} The children’s major concern was the increase in incidents of sexual abuse.\textsuperscript{255}

There have been legislative attempts to deal with the problem of the physical and sexual abuse of children. For example, the Sexual Offenses Act 23 of 1957 criminalizes sexual intercourse with minors.\textsuperscript{256} The difficulty with most child protection laws, however, is that they do not define clearly what constitutes ill-treatment, neglect,
or abuse. This lack of definition results in class, cultural, and moral biases in the reporting and enforcement process.  

Section 42(1) of the Child Care Act placed an obligation on dentists, medical practitioners, nurses, and social workers to report child abuse. Section 42(1) of the Child Care Act was limited in its reach in that it restricted the responsibility for reporting child abuse to specific health professionals and social workers, while excluding other professionals who would come into contact with children, such as mental health professionals, teachers, day care workers, and priests. Section 42 has now been amended by the Child Care Amendment Act to include teachers or "any person employed by or managing a children’s home, place of care or shelter."  

Section 4 of the Prevention of Family Violence was enacted in an effort to remedy the deficiency that existed in Section 42 of the Child Care Act prior to its amendment in 1996. Section 4 of the Prevention of Family Violence Act obligates "[a]ny person who examines, treats, attends to, advises, instructs or cares for any child" to report the ill-treatment of such child to the police, the Commissioner of Child Welfare, or a social worker.  

Chapter 3 of the Child Care Act provides mechanisms for the removal of abused or neglected children from their families to places of safety. Sections 11 and 12 of the Child Care Act empower police officers, social workers, and other authorized persons to remove children from their homes to places of safety, with or


258. § 42(1) of Child Care Act 74 of 1983.

259. Id. See Van Dokkum, supra note 257, at 171–72.

260. § 15(a) of Child Care Amendment Act 96 of 1996.

Notwithstanding the provisions of any other law, every dentist, medical practitioner, nurse, or social worker or teacher, or any person employed by or managing a children's home, place of care or shelter, who examines, attends or deals with any child in circumstances giving rise to the suspicion that that child has been ill-treated, or suffers from any injury, single or multiple, the cause of which probably might have been deliberate, or suffers from a nutritional deficiency disease, shall immediately notify the Director-General or any officer designated by him or her for the purpose of this section, of those circumstances.

Id.


262. See id.; Van Dokkum, supra note 257, at 172–73.

263. §§ 10–16 of Child Care Act 74 of 1983.
without a warrant. The forcible entry of premises is also allowed. Certain circumstances may require removal of children from abusive situations, however, actions taken pursuant to sections 11 and 12 may give rise to constitutional challenges based on the infringement of the right to privacy.

Section 14 of the Child Care Act sets out criteria for the removal of children from their homes. Under the original version of the Act, a finding of parental guilt was required. This requirement was unsatisfactory because the parent or guardian had to be unable or unfit to have custody of the child. Fortunately, section 14(4)(b) has been amended to give it a child-centered focus. A finding of parental guilt is no longer required. Insofar as it only requires a “child in need of care,” the amended Act operates on child-centered criteria.

The criminal trial process also has been reformed to enable child witnesses who are victims of abuse to testify against their abusers in a non-intimidating and child-friendly setting. Section 170A of the Criminal Procedure Act has reformed the criminal trial process to enable child complainants to give evidence in court against their abusers without all of the harshness of the adversarial process. This provision makes it possible for children to give evidence by video link or from behind a one-way mirror as long as the accused can observe and hear the child witness. This provision also makes it possible for cross examination of child witnesses to be conducted through an intermediary. In Klink v. Regional Court Magistrate, the constitutionality of providing for the questioning of a child witness through an intermediary was challenged. There the Court decided that

[i]t is ... possible that the forcefulness and effect of cross-examination may, to some extent, be blunted when an intermediary is interposed between the ques-
tioner and the witness. But this does not mean that the accused is denied the right to a fair trial, for in deciding whether his rights have been violated it is also necessary to take into account the interest of the child witness.276

Advances in technology, such as the Internet, have made it even more difficult to detect and report child sexual abuse. The nature of interaction on the Internet, particularly the anonymity of the user, has made it possible for children to access pornographic materials and to interact with adult users. The South African lawmakers and educators need to be aware of the negative potential of the Internet, and they need to place controls on the accessibility of sexual materials to children and prohibit child pornography on the Internet.277

IV. CHILDREN’S RIGHTS AND FAMILY AUTONOMY

Child-centered approaches to rights discourse are often opposed by adults who perceive children’s rights as extraneous and inconsistent with family or parental autonomy.278 Parent-centered approaches, which seek to insulate the family from state interference, are premised on the public/private dichotomy.279 Because the family performs a public function by rearing children, it is inaccurate to view the family as operating outside the public sphere.280 Non-regulation would reinforce existing inequalities in parent/child relations and idealize the family as a safe haven for children.281 Where families fail to meet their obligations towards their children, it is appropriate for the state to interfere. Accordingly, section 28(1)(c) empowers the state to protect the child’s right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care, and social services.

276. Id. at 411-12.
278. LEACH, supra note 32, at 204.
279. Bainham, supra note 81, at 206; see also GITTENS, supra note 81.
280. Eekelaar, supra note 83.
281. Lasch, supra note 84.
A. The Right to Basic Nutrition, Shelter, Basic Health Care, and Social Services

The right to nutritional well-being, shelter, health, and social services is recognized in international law, in article 24(2)(c) and (e) and article 27(3) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Section 30(1) of the interim Constitution provided for the right to "security, basic nutrition and basic health and social services." The reference to security was unnecessary in view of the protection of the right to "security of the person" already granted under section 11 of the interim Constitution. This confusion has been cleared in section 28(1) of the Constitution by the deletion of any reference to the right to security. Section 28(1)(c) provides that "[e]very child has the right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services."

Both international human rights law and municipal law recognize that the implementation of economic, social, and cultural rights are subject to resource constraints and will be achieved only over time. For example, article 4 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child refers to the obligation of state parties regarding economic, social, and cultural rights to "undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources." Article 24(1) refers to "the highest attainable standard of health." Article 28(1) explains that

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282. *U.N. Convention, supra* note 9, art. 24(2)(d)–(e). This article provides that the State shall take appropriate measures

[...]

283. Id. art. 27(3). Article 27(3) states in part that "States Parties... shall[,] in case of need[,] provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing." Id.


287. Id.

288. *U.N. Convention, supra* note 9, art. 4.

289. Id. art. 24(1).
the "States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively." The rights in section 28(1)(c) of the final Constitution also are worded in a restrictive manner, referring only to basic needs and restricting rights holders to children. Human rights activists and children's rights advocates may argue, with some justification, that "many of the problems of violations or neglect of economic, social and cultural rights have more to do with power relationships in society, or a lack of 'political will,' than with resource constraints."

Under common law and statute, and even under international law, parents bear the primary responsibility to provide support for their children. The state has a positive duty to prevent parents from infringing upon this right. However, where parents fail, section 28(1)(c) of the final Constitution places the obligation on the state to ensure the realization of this right. The Social Pensions Act governs the state's obligation where parents fail to meet their primary responsibility. The state provides a small monthly maintenance allowance scheme which is administered by the Department

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290. Id. art. 28(1).
291. S. AFR. CONST. § 28(1)(c).
292. de Vos, supra note 67, at 255 (internal quotation marks omitted) (citation omitted).
294. VAN LEEUWEN, CENSURA FORENSIS 1.1.10.1 (1662); Union Gov't v. Warneke 1911 AD 657; Lesbury van Zyl, Maintenance, in FAMILY LAW SERVICE 1 (I.D. Schafer ed., 1988).
296. Article 18 of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child states that "States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern." U.N. Convention, supra note 9, art. 18 (emphasis added).
297. Section 50 of the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 and section 11 of the Maintenance Act 23 of 1963 make it an offense for any person who fails to provide a child with sufficient maintenance while able to do so. For instructive decisions, see State v. Diedericks, 1972 (4) SA 266 (NC) (holding that a charge of failure to maintain can be sustained only when a responsible person is in a position to provide maintenance for a child yet fails to do so); State v. Boshoff, 1971 (1) SA 314 (T) (discussing a charge of failure to maintain a child when the paternity of the child is in doubt); State v. Jeggels, 1962 (3) SA 704 (C) (upholding a father's conviction for failure to maintain his child); see also Bridgette Clark, Children's Right To Support—A Public Responsibility?, 1996 ACTA JURIDICA 82, 93–96 (arguing that reliance on private law remedies is not effective); BOSMAN–SWANEPOEL & WESSELS, supra note 18, at 81.
298. de Vos, supra note 67, at 256.
of Welfare. There are two types of grants under the scheme: a parental allowance and a child’s allowance.

Following the report of the Lund Committee on Child and Family Support, which recommended the scrapping of the R 430 per month parental allowance and the reduction of the R 135 a month child allowance to R 75 per month, Welfare Minister Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi proposed legislation implementing the Lund Committee recommendations. The Welfare Minister’s plan was severely criticized by non-governmental organizations, such as the Black Sash and the Poverty Reduction Monitoring Services of the Institute for a Democratic South Africa, for placing fiscal concerns above child welfare. The United Nations, in proclaiming a “new ethic” as part of the Declaration made at its World Summit on Children held in September 1990, stated

[the mental and physical growth of a child cannot be asked to wait until the interest rate falls, or until commodity prices recover, or until debt repayments have been rescheduled, or until the economy returns to growth, or until after a general election or until a war is over. In our time, for the first time, we have the chance to begin shielding the lives and the normal growth of children from the worst excesses, misfortunes, and mistakes of the world into which they are born.]

The parental allowance is awarded to South African Citizens who have been resident in the country for five years. The applicant parent must be unmarried, divorced, or widowed. There is no entitlement for a woman with children on family benefits when she is cohabiting with a man. “If married, her husband must have deserted her for over three months and be entitled to a state pension, he must have been declared unfit for work for more than six months

300. Clark, supra note 297, at 85.
301. Id.
303. Id.
305. Clark, supra note 297, at 85.
306. Id.
or sentenced to jail for more than three months.”

To receive a child’s allowance, the applicant must prove that the child’s father is deceased, disabled, or has disappeared. South African welfare policies are based on the patriarchal family model and its assumptions of male dominance and female dependency. Such policies reinforce gender inequality.

The sexual exclusivity required of the wife in a traditional patriarchal marriage, which thereby guarantees economic support, is reproduced with the state then assuming the husband’s economic role. Where a woman is viewed as having formed a potentially sexually exclusive relationship with a man, the state will withdraw, thereby transferring the economic burden that flows from the sexual relation to this new source of support. . . . The effect on the sole-support mothers is to constrict their realm of private action and punish them economically where they transgress the presumptions of the male breadwinner model of human relationships. This attitude is more than bourgeoisie morality; it is the strictest application of patriarchal control to women of childbearing capacity who otherwise exist outside a relationship with a man. . . . Further, in its relation with single-mother-led families, it actively replicates the exchange of exclusive sexual service for economic support, on which the dependency equation is based.

South African welfare policies, like those of most Western countries, are out of step with social reality in so far as they are based on assumptions of female dependency and they are contrary to the equality provisions contained in section 9(3) of the Constitution.

B. Section 28(2): The Supremacy of the Best Interests of the Child

Section 28(2) of the final Constitution announces that “[a] child’s best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child.” This principle suggests that children’s best
interests trump all other considerations. The best interests standard is implicated in all matters affecting the child, such as custody, access, and adoption. It is an indeterminate standard, and is for the most part subject to judicial discretion. The indeterminacy of the best interests standard has enabled the courts to interpret it in a manner that reinforces societal prejudices in custody and access disputes in favor of heterosexual parents over homosexual parents and mothers over fathers.

The current constitutional context has led to a re-examination of the judicial application of the best interests standard as preferring mothers over fathers. For example, in *Van der Linde v. Van der Linde*, Judge Hatting discarded the primary caretaker presumption as anachronistic and reflective of another time. He explicitly favored equal parenting rights. He commented that mothering is not gender specific and that it is indicative of function rather than persona. A father can be just as good a “mother” as the biological mother, and naturally a mother can be just as good a “father” as the biological father. The quality of a parental role is not determined by gender. The *Van der Linde* case clearly reflects the overarching influence of the Constitution in the development of South African equality jurisprudence and consequently, the growing influence of the child-centered norms and values.

A reading of various legislation, such as the Child Care Act and the Termination of Pregnancy Act, points to a duality in approach when dealing with children’s rights. On the one hand, section 28(g) of the Constitution, read with sections 18(c) and 39(4) of the Child Care Act, apply a parent-centered standard that views children as dependent and incapable of making independent decisions about their lives. In other words, someone makes the determination as to what is in the child’s best interests. Section

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313. See, e.g., Van Rooyen v. Van Rooyen, 1994 (2) 325 (W); Mosikatsana, *supra* note 28, at 114.
315. 1996 (3) SALR 509 (O).
316. *Id.* at 514–15.
317. *Id.*
318. *Id.*
319. *Id.*
320. *Id.*
322. Termination of Pregnancy Act 92 of 1996.
323. S. AFR. CONST. § 28(g).
39(4) of the Child Care Act restricts the right to consent to surgical procedures to persons above eighteen years old. Minors over fourteen years of age can consent only to medical and non-surgical procedures. Minors under fourteen years of age cannot consent to either, as they require parental consent.

The provisions of section 39(4) of the Child Care Act are clearly parent-centered and are inconsistent with section 2 of the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act 92 of 1996, which permits minors, regardless of age, to consent to abortion, even against the wishes of their parents or guardians. This Act promotes autonomous decision-making on the part of children in matters affecting their life circumstances or health.

CONCLUSION

Constitutionalization of children's rights in section 28 of the Constitution marks a watershed period in the history of South Africa, and it represents a meaningful attempt to provide a constitutional framework for a child-centered law reform program. It also provides a basis for challenging racially oppressive and parent-centered apartheid laws which undermine the child's best interests. Prior to the implementation of the Constitution, the South African welfare policies were racially structured, patriarchal, and parent-centered. Black children were denied basic human rights such as education, nutrition, and health care. They were denied South African citizenship under the homelands policy, and their families were removed forcibly from their lands. They were victims of police brutality, and they were detained for long periods without trial under conditions that were in violation of international law.

Constitutionalization provides a basis for challenging the racially structured and parent-centered child welfare laws which are not in the best interests of the child. For example the child's constitutional right to nutrition contained in section 28(1) formed the basis for the attack on Minister Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi's attempt to lower the child allowance. It also provided the ideological basis for the Children's National Feeding Scheme and the Children's Fund set up by the President in furtherance of the political culture of children's rights.

325. § 39(4)(a) of Child Care Act 74 of 1983.
326. Id. § 39(4)(b).
327. Id. § 39(4); see also Charles Ngwena, Health Care Decision-Making and the Competent Minor: The Limits of Self Determination, 1996 ACTA JURIDICA 132, 139–40 (describing the effect of § 39(4) on minors).
328. § 2 of Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act 92 of 1996.
329. Id.
Other rights contained in the Constitution that have succeeded in promoting a child-centered legislative program include the following rights: 1) not to be involved in armed conflict; 2) not to be detained except as a measure of last resort; 3) to have legal representation; 4) to be protected from exploitative labor practices; 5) to have a name and nationality; and 6) to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation.