


# I'm not your little boy but a king's servant: re-reading 1 Samuel 17 through representation

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**Dates:**

Received: 09 Mar. 2023

Accepted: 06 Nov. 2023

Published: 10 Jan. 2024

**How to cite this article:**

Ngqeza, Z., 2024, 'I'm not your little boy but a king's servant: re-reading 1 Samuel 17 through representation', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 45(1), a2838. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v45i1.2838>

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Children's ability to be social beings and change agents is a recent development in the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies. Scholars of Childhood Studies have been calling for a move beyond the situation where children claim their rights into a situation where children fully participate in shaping the world in which both children and adults are co-creators of the future they want. This is known as representation in the form of negotiating power, participation, and re-imagining citizenship. This study seeks to read 1 Samuel 17 in light of childist representation. The muting of children's voices and agency in the Old Testament texts will be challenged because children are also fully human beings. This study will therefore draw insights from the scholars of Childhood Studies and childism to re-read an Old Testament text. This study will employ the childist biblical approach to read 1 Samuel 17. Childist biblical approach questions the way in which children are presented in biblical texts. Therefore, David will be presented as a child who claimed his agency by participating in the efforts of defeating war and empire.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** This article displays intersections between Childhood Studies and biblical studies. It draws from scholars of Childhood Studies to re-read an Old Testament text.

**Keywords:** representation; childhood studies; the child; childhood; childism; voice; agency; biblical studies; Old Testament; king's servant.

## Introduction

There has been a concern among childist biblical interpretation scholars that the narrators of biblical texts and the biblical commentators do not take children's lives, voices, and agency seriously. Children are often presented as 'extras' and backgrounds, while adults are presented as the main characters in biblical narratives (Hens-Piazza 2003:121). The muting of children's voices in the Bible and contemporary society is an issue of concern (Cf. Fewell 2003:26; Spyrou 2018:87). However, this study seeks to go beyond addressing the children's rights, voice, and agency into challenging the limitations of what 'war-affected children' in the biblical narratives can do or not (De Andrado 2021:462). Representation as a Childhood Studies concept will be used to position children as those who have the ability to participate together with adults in justice-seeking solutions. The representation concept will help us position the child David in 1 Samuel 17 as not just a child but also as the challenger and defeater of an empire (Goliath and Philistines). Thus, David will be shown as a child who engages (in solidarity with the war-affected children in the global south) in the actions of defeating war and empire. This study will help us go beyond seeing children as 'ignorant, capricious, and in need of strict discipline' but as equal partners with adults in creating a better world in the Bible and contemporary society (Gundry-Volf 2001:35).

The methodology used in this study is the childist biblical approach which questions the way in which children are presented in the biblical narratives and in Bible commentaries. Thus, this study aims to read 1 Samuel 17 from a childist perspective. This study is part of a call for a different way of reading the Bible in ways that 'redeem the lives of women and children' (Ngqeza 2021:1). Because of the 'complexity' of the child in society and the Bible, such an approach will have to be done in partnering with scholars from other disciplines (e.g. human and social sciences).

## The concept of representation

Within the broader Childhood Studies and children's rights movements, there is a call to move beyond children's rights into socio-political representation. Such a call is driven by an admission in Childhood Studies that 'children should possess political rights to participation, voice, and citizenship' (Wall & Dar 2011:595). However, Wall and Dar are not convinced that in a more

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specific way, the rights of children to participate in democratic government have been met even though in the biblical world the system of governance and/or authority was not democratic (2011:595). It is necessary to explore how children in the Old Testament have exhibited the ideas of voice, agency, and representation in the face of war and empire. Childism deems it important to see children as 'difference makers' in (biblical) society in as far as the ways in which they demonstrate 'participation, voice, citizenship' and urgency. This is vital to explore because Thomas (2021) argues that the ideas of children's agency are 'empirical questions'. How do children such as David, Daniel, and his friends use their voice, participation, citizenship, and agency to challenge power in times of war and conflict? This is a question I am concerned about in this study. In doing so, I will read 1 Samuel 17 alongside Wall and Dar's articulation of child representation in the social and political arena. Wall and Dar argue that the notion of the right of children to representation can only be witnessed if we unthink and re-think representation 'as a right not so much to exercise autonomy as to make a *theo-political*<sup>1</sup> deference' (2011:595). Childism does not challenge adult-centrism and power for children to assume independence but that they (children) be equal partners with adults in making a difference in society. In the end, childism as a concept that deals with the power relations between children and adults, calls for 'enabling children's fuller representational empowerment' (Wall & Dar 2011:595). Thus, children should not only be receivers of (human) rights but should be involved in creating a new society with more 'life-affirming' rights and government (2011:595). Furthermore, Wall and Dar argue that scholars of childhood studies as well as children's rights activists should appreciate the ability to go beyond article number 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 2011:595; UN General Assembly 1989:4).

## Background of the field of childhood studies and its challenges for a biblical scholar

Spyrou observes that since the 1980s, Childhood Studies emerged 'as a field with its own agendas, frustrations, and promises' (2018:4). This field of study emerged as a consequence of discontentment with previous paradigms, epistemologies, and pedagogies which contributed to oppressive (instead of liberating) understandings of children and childhoods (Spyrou 2018:4). Thus for nearly 30 years, Childhood Studies seeks to help us to 're-think children and childhood by bringing forth new ways of seeing' (Spyrou 2018:4–5). These 'new ways of seeing children and childhoods' are needed both in biblical and contemporary society. This is the reason children and childhood need to be studied 'on their own' in a similar way feminist biblical scholars study women in the Bible and in contemporary society. Because childhood studies is not a discipline but an interdisciplinary

<sup>1</sup>Wall and Dar speak of political difference while I choose the term 'theo-political' difference to demonstrate the ways in which political decisions and endeavours have theological consequences and vice versa.

field, it brings together scholars and activists from different disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, medicine, politics, education, geography, religious and theological studies, among others. The scholars from these academic disciplines offer scholarly works that take seriously the lives of children and childhoods. They also draw insights and perspectives from each other to respond to the complexities of 'the child'. Thus, Childhood Studies goes beyond disciplinary confines and forms a 'truly integrated field' (Rosen 2020:6). This does not mean that Childhood Studies has left their original disciplines. For any interdisciplinary project to succeed, its researchers need to have a strong disciplinary competence (Rosen 2020:7). Therefore, biblical scholars who are engaged in Childhood Studies are committed to reading and interpreting biblical texts from the perspective of the child. According to Spyrou, 'recentering the child' is very important to the field of childhood studies. While Alanen emphasises the interdisciplinarity and trans-disciplinarity of the field of childhood studies, she excludes religious and biblical studies when she mentions disciplines that are or should be concerned about children or childhoods (2012:419). What about biblical studies? This is astonishing because many people draw inspiration from the Bible on how to raise and discipline children. The Bible is also full of narratives about the dehumanisation and abuse of children (e.g. 2 Ki 6:24–31, Lm 2:20 & 4:10). Thus, interdisciplinary childhood studies cannot be done without biblical studies. Placing children in the centre of biblical narratives and contemporary society is important, unlike seeing children as supporting characters in adult-centred stories and societies. This is what I seek to do in this study, re-reading a biblical passage through the lens of a child (David) by means of employing the concept of representation. This is the reason I am using scholars such as Wall and Dar (2011) to read a biblical text about the child, David in 1 Samuel 17. I collaborate with scholars of childhood studies to re-read the place of children and childhoods in biblical texts. I read 1 Samuel 17 in conversation with scholars from social sciences and humanities who are interested in children and childhoods in society. This is important to do because childhood and 'the child' as concepts are complex to the extent that the childist approach forces a scholar to 'consult researchers from other disciplines' (Alanen 2012:419).

Hammersley deals with what is understood as the main promises and obligations of childhood studies (2017:113). According to Hammersley, this is 'the idea that children are worthy of study "in their own right," that childhood is a "social construction," that children are and must be treated as active agents' (2017:113). This includes the idea that adult researchers must move from researching about children to researching with children. These ideas about children and childhoods are not without challenges, and are viewed as framing a new paradigm that commenced in the 1980s and 1990s (Hammersley 2017:113).

Childhood Studies calls for a shift from the way we understand children as passive objects into seeing them as active participants in society (Malone, Tesar & Arndt 2020:83).

At the centre of Childhood Studies is a growing consensus to incorporate children as participants. Instead of researchers and activists seeing children as objects, they now include them as significant enablers in research and society. Childhood studies considers children as 'holders of rights' and no longer sees them as 'irrational, incompetent and powerless' (Huf 2020:4). Huf further argues that seeing children as 'rights holders' should go hand in hand with acknowledging them as 'competent agents of their own lives' (2020:4). Thus, from a childist perspective, children are able to tell their own story as 'competent interpreters of everyday worlds' (Huf 2020:4). Thus, children can work with adults in different forms of research activities and community projects. This does not mean that children can work alone and be fully independent from adults. Instead, both children and adults are equal partners in shaping a new world.

Childhood Studies seeks to undo the inhumane ideas of 19th-century industrialisation and democratisation which categorised children as 'unhuman' who seek to be human beings by means of parental guidance and formal education (Malone et al. 2020:30). Childhood Studies is about re-humanising the child. It exhibits the idea that children are already human beings with rights, voice, and agency.

Because the lives and the voices of children have been ignored in biblical texts, there is a need to read the Bible in ways that redeem the lives of children. Fewell calls this 'reading the Bible for the sake of children' (2003:33). Thus, recentering the child in biblical texts is important for a child-centered biblical scholarship.

The interdisciplinary nature of Childhood Studies does not come without challenges. There is a tendency to view interdisciplinary scholarship as an enemy of commitment to one's home discipline. Thus, childhood studies scholars may be accused of having 'left their discipline'. Alanen is of the view that 'disciplinarianism and interdisciplinarianism are not adversaries, they should not be seen to compete with each other' (2012:421). They instead need each other. The purpose behind interdisciplinarity is to make use of expertise and insights from one or more academic disciplines. However, for scholars to engage effectively in interdisciplinary research, they must first be competent in their discipline (Alanen 2012:421). Thus, doing Childhood Studies as a biblical scholar, means that one has a deep commitment and competence in biblical studies. But because of the complexity of 'the child', he or she draws insights from the scholars of human and social sciences to re-centre children and childhoods in the Bible. In the case of this study, an Old Testament passage is re-read while employing insights from Wall and Dar (2011).

The other challenge with Childhood Studies is its claims concerning the social position of children and childhoods in society. For instance, Hammersley is opposed to some of the issues raised in Childhood Studies such as children's ability to have their own voice and agency as well as the idea that

childhood can be a field to be pursued in its own right (2017:115). However, the social difference between adults and children should not be ignored. There are also differences even among children. Childhoods are not homogeneous. This is similar to women's lives because they have unique experiences in terms of gender, race, and class. I, therefore, find Hammersley (2017:115) not taking the unique experiences of children and childhoods seriously. The fact that there are similarities between adults and children in terms of the feelings of anger, sadness, and happiness does not mean that there are no fundamental social differences between them. I find Hammersley contradicting himself by refusing to accept the idea that children must be studied in their own right. He compares the unique experiences of children to those of women and adults. Women are already studied in their own right. Like children and childhoods, women's experiences are not homogeneous. This is the reason there is a variety of feminist and womanist approaches such as Feminist, Womanist, Mujerista, Hispanic, Bosadi (womanhood) in Gender Studies (Cf. Loades 2006:83; Masenya 2014:183–190). A similar approach can be taken to children and childhoods. The fact that children share characteristics with adults does not mean that children and childhoods cannot be studied on their own. In his unpublished PhD thesis, Zukile Ngqeza, demonstrated the ways in which children and women share similar oppressions, often from the same oppressor (men) (Ngqeza 2021:11). Childhood studies is not about making children adults but is about 'redeeming them (children)' from adult centred views that render them (children) as 'not-yet' human beings.

One other aspect is that Childhood Studies is not a denial of the small physical structure and/or body of children. While there are things that children cannot do, it does not mean that they do not have 'agentic ability'. It is inadequate to define children only biologically or in terms of the body without acknowledging their capabilities. To say that there is more about children (in terms of voice, urgency, representation, motivation, etc) and childhoods than their small bodies is not an exaggeration as Hammersley seeks to suggest (2017:117–118).

One aspect of Childhood Studies is the idea that children have the ability to 'play an active (rather than a passive) role' in public life. For Hammersley, this means strict autonomy of children. I find Hammersley not understanding the role of children as active citizens (2017:118). One of the main arguments of Childhood Studies is that children have the ability and potential to be active social agents of society. They are equal partners with adults in playing the active citizenry role in changing the world. This speaks to both the teleological (telling a new story, in their own way) and deontological (in terms of obligations and duties) role of children alongside adults. It does not mean that children or adults are independent but they are interdependent (in need of each other with adults). Thus, children as active agents in society do not mean autonomy in the sense of not seeking the guidance of adults but that children have the ability to tell (in terms of *telos*) their own story and co-create a new world

together with adults. This is not autonomy or independence of children from adults but interdependence because both children and adults should be co-creators of a new *telos* or future for the world. Re-humanisation of children in ontological terms is very important. In my view, Hammersley and some critics of Childhood Studies think that as a methodological approach, childism is about un-childing the child. On the contrary, childism is about re-humanising children and childhoods. The idea of agency in relation to autonomy and responsibility also applies to adults.

While Thomas maintains the views expressed in Childhood Studies in terms of children as fully human beings with voice, agency, and representation, he accepts the different ways in which scholars approach Childhood Studies (2021:188). For instance, not all scholars of Childhood Studies are interested in children's rights issues and they also do not understand the meaning of childhood as a social construction in the same way. Because children and childhoods are not homogeneous, their approaches to Childhood Studies are also not homogeneous. Thus, attempting to dismiss Childhood Studies as a whole because of disagreements in some of its concepts as Hammersley (2017:115–117) does is not good enough.

Thomas contributes to helping build more sustainable Childhood Studies. Firstly, he argues that because Childhood Studies is an interdisciplinary field, there is, therefore, no rulebook or particular method of doing Childhood Studies (Thomas 2021:197). This does not mean that there are no particular concepts that distinguish Childhood Studies. But just as children and childhoods are diverse, so are the various approaches and facets of doing Childhood Studies. Secondly, the definition of Childhood Studies cannot be limited to biological, chronological age, legal, or cultural terms. The ideas of social constructionism cannot be ignored (Thomas 2021:197). A singular approach to defining childhood studies will not work. Lastly, (Thomas 2021:197) argues children's agency, voice, and representation are empirical questions. These are not just theoretical concerns or questions, but they are about living beings who experience abuse and dehumanisation both in the Bible and contemporary society. This is a very important remark if we have to consider children's agency, voice, and representation in the Old Testament. Biblical scholars should also grapple with these questions. Therefore, the claims of the children's agency, voice, and representation should be demonstrated in a practical way.

Furthermore, just like adults are not the same, and not all of them are competent to do social research and/or have agentic abilities. Similarly, children and childhoods are not homogeneous and issues of agentic ability and voice are not dependent on age (because not all adults can do these) but on daily lived experiences in society (Thomas 2021:198).

## A need to decolonise the field of childhood studies

There is a need to de-centre and decolonise childhood studies because many times the scholars of Childhood Studies are

based in Euro-American institutions, and they define children and childhood from their perspective. Because children and childhoods in the global north are not the same as in the global south, the diversity of social locations must be considered instead of confining children and childhoods to Euro-American terms. Therefore, Abebe, Dar and Lysa call for the recentring of 'southern perspectives'<sup>2</sup> in childhood studies (2022:3). They question why it is the case that many children and their experiences are mostly read by means of the perspectives from global north universities and thinkers (Abebe et al. 2022:3). Thus, there is a need for epistemic diversity in the field of childhood studies rather than the dominance of 'northern perspectives' (Abebe et al. 2022:2–3). This is similar to the idea of pluriversity<sup>3</sup> as emphasised in decolonial studies.

There is also a tendency to define 'the child' from the Western middle-class perspectives. Many times, what is understood to be universal definitions of childhood is in actual fact, western views about childhood. Hence, Adebe et al (2022:4) contest the concept of 'global child' firstly, from the premise that often what claims universal validation in childhood studies is many ways the ideas from a 'historically northern-centric elite' academicians and scholars. Even the term, global, is problematic. Hence, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018:17) calls for 'provincialising Europe and de-provincialising Africa'. For Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018:18) 'to provincialise Europe' is basically to 'de-Europeanise the world' especially the global south. Making western ideas about children and childhoods as ideals that must be imposed on the global south community must be challenged. Children and childhoods should be studied in relation to the kind of world/society they live in, and the particular experiences that they are associated with. For instance, some children live in their home countries without war while other children are victims of war and forced migration. Thus, the concept of a universal image of childhood does not exist on its own but it is a result of ideologies and knowledge systems that emerged from elite groups of the northern part of the world and their victims who embraced the views of empire about their lives, children, and culture (Abebe et al. 2022:6). There is a need for more 'alternatives, pluralities, multiplicities with which childhoods need to be viewed from below, that is, from the margins and peripheries of global knowledge production' (Abebe et al. 2022:7). Such an approach is vital when we read the Bible from the perspectives of children and childhoods in societies that are 'on the underside of empire' (Sheerattan-Bisnauth et al. 2018:17). In this study, I read the story of David in solidarity with children of the global South, who are affected by war, violence, poverty and collective trauma. It is these children whose voice, agency and representation have been muted, that 1 Samuel 17 gives a voice, when read from a childist perspective.

2. Abebe et al. (2022:2) do not prefer the terms 'global south' and 'global north' instead prefer the term 'southern perspectives' (2022:2).

3. The concept of 'pluriversity' is part of a decolonial discourse that argues for a university or academia as a place of many (plural) ideas rather than one (uni or unilateral) idea. Thus, ideas from the global north and the global south must be appreciated and co-exist in the academic enterprise (i.e. Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018).

## Applying the concept of (child) representation in re-reading 1 Samuel 17

Before applying the concept of (child) representation, it is imperative to first discuss the context in which 1 Samuel 17 takes place and how biblical scholars have interpreted this biblical narrative. 1 Samuel 17 takes place in the context of the war between the Israelites and the Philistines. A man called Goliath asked that the Israelites grant him a man who could fight and defeat him. It is important to 'socially locate'<sup>4</sup> Goliath as both male and adult with social, political, and religious power; and on the other hand, locate David as a child rather than an 'anointed' warrior. The initiators of war in this story are men, that is, Goliath and Saul. The child David finds himself being asked by his father to send food to his brothers who were part of this war. Any form of violence that could take place in the war zone where David was sent would not have spared him. This is similar to the context of Africa, where men initiate wars that in the end affect women and children. David joins the list of 'war-affected' children in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>5</sup> It is interesting that Kiel and Delitzsch (2022:96) acknowledge the war situation in 1 Samuel 17, but they do not read it from a childist viewpoint. They do not problematise the fact that Jesse sent a little boy to a war zone, just to deliver food. While this study seeks to centre the ability of children as empire resisters, that was not Jesse's intention when he sent the child David to take food to his brothers. Constable (2023) also does not read the story of David and Goliath in solidarity with 'war-affected children' in the biblical and contemporary context. He takes a devotional approach by celebrating David's words about God without interrogating such strides against the adult-centred views about children's (dis)abilities. Both Kiel and Delitzsch (2022:96) as well as Constable (2023:131, 133) see David's presence in the war zone as obedience to his father and his victory as a result of trust in Yahweh. They do not see it as a problem for a father to send his little son to a war scene. They also do not connect David's demand to be allowed to challenge Goliath as that which exhibits children's voice, agency, and representation to resist empire and communal violence. Phillips focusses on the notion that David was anointed by the Holy Spirit which enabled him to defeat Goliath (2012:372). Phillips does not deal with the limitations that came with being a child in ancient Israel, and what that meant regarding what children could or not do (2012:372). Brueggemann acknowledges the intensity of the war in this narrative to the extent that he argues that 'Philistines still remain a threat to Israel' (1990:139). But Brueggemann also does not see it as a problem for Jesse to send David in a context of war. Instead, Brueggemann sees David as a warrior without thoroughly engaging his childhood and adult-centred

4. Feminist biblical scholars such as Musa Dube and Miranda Pillay understand social location as understanding a person's status in society such as age, gender, class, and power with its variations.

5. In the Hebrew Bible, there is a list of children affected by war, siege, and forced migration. For instance, the children of the cannibal mothers in 2 Kings 17:24-31, Lamentations 2:20 and 4:10, Jephthah's daughter in Judges 11:30-40, Daniel and his friend Daniel 1 and 3, among others.

views that were denying his agency and representation (1990:139).

Brueggemann notes the way in which Jesse was loyal to Saul to the extent of putting his three sons 'in the service'. Jesse's loyalty to Saul is expressed through sending his children (including David, though as a food deliverer) to the army service. This shows the ways in which children are used as tokens of loyalty between adult elites of society. Often that compromises the safety of children (1990:139). The idea that David asked an 'innocent question and/or questions' at least for Brueggemann, is a challenge when reading the pericope from a childist approach (1990:139). It exacerbates the notion that children are stupid, foolish, and innocent, and do not possess an agentic ability. Yet, Brueggemann admits that David in this narrative engages a 'battle of rhetoric and of nerves' (1990:140). For me, it is more than that. David comes as a war strategist and subsequently fights Goliath on behalf of the king and Israelites. Brueggemann argues that David's older brother and the elders ignored him (David) just like the brothers of Joseph did to him (1990:140). Adult characters in this narrative are not just undermining or preventing David as a child. They are naturally expressing adult-centred views that for many years have denied children their full humanity, agency, and representation.

As stated in the introduction, the childist biblical approach requires a biblical scholar to partner with other sciences to read a biblical text. For instance, De Andrado offers 'an alternative interpretation of 2 Kings 5 by drawing upon research on the concept of resilience with regard to war-affected children' (2021:462). She highlights the idea that the words of the girl child in 2 Kings 5 'reflect a resilience-building process by affirming her cultural identity, values and beliefs' (2021:461). While it is good to acknowledge the traumas and violence that children suffer, it is also good to acknowledge and affirm their representations in terms of voice, agency, and participation. Thus, De Andrado draws insights from 'studies of resilience in war-affected children' (2021:462). I intend to use a similar approach in this study by applying the concept of representation in reading and interpreting 1 Samuel 17.

In re-reading 1 Samuel 17, I will use four ideas suggested by Dar and Wall that assist in moving beyond the notion of children's voice (as stated in Article 12 of UNCRC) into challenging adult-centred power through representation. These are negotiating power, representation as participation, representation as citizenship, and representation as the right to make a difference. I will then use these four ideas to offer a childist reading of I Samuel 17. This approach will further assist in the future of children's representation in the Bible and contemporary South Africa.

### Negotiating power

The deployment of children into significant structures of society is not so popular. There have been practically very few children who have been designated into royal positions

such as 'kings and queens and nobility' (Wall & Dar 2011:596). In many instances, children do not possess social, economic, and political authority. This does not take away the impact that children display through human rights movements, marches, protests, and campaigns (Wall & Dar 2011:596). The democratic enterprise has often been an adult venture. However, in the recent past children have started to make their voices heard. For Wall and Dar, the idea is not to only give children a 'voice', but it is to 'establish systematic ways of representing children's political voices in policy-making' (2011:596). Thus children's voice(s) should result in policy-making. Children's institutions such as children's parliament are often inadequate because, in the end, adults are the ones that control the process and offer conclusions (Wall & Dar 2011:597). Wall and Dar take the discussion further, by calling for children to vote (2011:197).

While 1 Samuel 17 is not necessarily about a political contest in similar ways as contemporary democracies, it is a biblical narrative that is about war and empire in which it is adults who participate. Both Goliath and Saul are adults who represent their gods (Yahweh for Saul). Verse 1 says 'Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle (למלחמה)' (NLT). This confirms adultism that David would challenge. In Childhood Studies, adultism is understood as toxic for children in the same way sexism is to women (Alderson 2020:2). Anderson defines adultism as 'prejudice against children and excessive respect for adults' (2020:2). Furthermore, adultism denotes the idea of socially and structurally excluding children in society. Thus, to demonstrate the adult-centredness of this למלחמה Goliath summoned a man (שׂא) as opposed to a child/boy. In verse 10, Goliath asks to be given a man (שׂא). The implication is both androcentric and adult-centred because שׂא refers to a male in gender and adult in age. It is in such a limitation that the child David negotiates power as an equal to Goliath and also positions himself as a war strategist alongside adults. David does not criticise adults, but sees them as equal partners in defeating the empire (Goliath).

For the childist approach, there are implications for the roles of Goliath and David for power negotiation. David challenges adultism in 1 Samuel 17. He refuses that as a child he must be excluded in efforts to defeat empire (Philistines). Since childism is understood as an idea that in spite of 'differences in age, body size, brain development, experience, and power' both children and adults are intrinsically of equal value (Warming 2020:2). Childist approach as a methodology, challenges and interrupts the unequal power relations between children and adults in biblical texts and contemporary society. Thus, the role of David in 1 Samuel 17 is an embodied resistance to the adult-centred idea that only an adult male can defeat Goliath. When reading this text from a childist approach, David's actions are seen as negotiating against adultism. This has implications for the South African context, where children are involved in climate change protests and COP27 debates.

## Representation as participation

One of the concepts that is important in representation is that of (children's) participation. Participation is a very complex phenomenon, and it has various interpretations and approaches. In feminist and childhood studies, participation is about moving beyond acknowledging the intrinsic worth of women and children into resetting the social and political structures of society in ways that fully affirm and include them (women and children) (Wall & Dall 2011:599). Participation is further concerned with how children take part in the development of 'their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live' (Wall & Dar 2011:599–600). Participation goes beyond the notion of children making their voices heard. It is more about challenging adult-centred socio-political establishments and arrangements. It does not call for the independence of children but interdependence between children and adults for the betterment of society (cf. Wall & Dar 2011:601). This is what the child David does in 1 Samuel 17. He refuses to be only a boy who delivers food to adults who are involved in activities that may bring change to public life. He resists being limited to tending the sheep of his father and not having a voice in matters of challenging empire (Goliath and the Philistines). When Saul asks him (David) whose son he is, he refers to himself as the son of Jesse, the servant עֶבֶד of the king (1 Sm 17:58). David does not say 'I am the son of Jesse' but he says 'I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem' (NIV). It was common in ancient Israel for the sons to follow the same vocation as their fathers. In metaphoric terms, David in this narrative is the servant עֶבֶד of the king (Saul and Yahweh). In ancient Israel, children would not be servants of the king (whether the earthly king or God as king). Thus, David designates himself as the עֶבֶד of the king by means of resisting and recentring his agency as a child in the face of oppression and empire. The עֶבֶד in this context does not refer to a slave but an attendant or the official (as in the case of a government official). David resists the limitations of being a shepherd and a food deliverer (domestic work), and places himself in the socio-political arena or vocation as an official of the king. This challenges the adult-centred perspectives about what children can or cannot do in both private and public life.

## Representation as citizenship

One of the ways to understand the representation of children in the socio-political arena is through the aspect of children's citizenship. The interpretations of citizenship have always been 'less-Childist'. However, the scholars of Childhood Studies call for equal citizenship between children and adults, especially because not all adults exhibit the 'autonomy, rationality, and capacities' required by long-held interpretations of citizenship (Wall & Dar 2011:602). Children's citizenship is not about the autonomy of children (or even of adults), but it is about recognising children and adults need each other. The relationship between children and adults is that of interdependence. It is about the inclusion of those who were excluded because of how

different they are (Wall & Dar 2011:603). It is a move away from seeing children as 'citizens in the making' into seeing them as full citizens who are 'socially different'. Citizenship should appreciate 'difference' in society (Wall & Dar 2011:604). That will make citizenship to be inclusive rather than exclusive.

Verse 29 says 'Now, what have I done? Said, David. Can't I even speak' (NIV)? The word *דבר* denotes speech, speaking, and words but it also includes acts or doing. Citizenship includes the right to free speech and participation in one's chosen vocation. David affirms his citizenry through rights to truth-telling (*telos*) and participating in acts or duties (deontology) of changing the world as an equal citizen with adults. David claims his right to 'dialogical interdependence'. He makes his voice heard about his intervention to participate in a war as an equal citizen with adults. David's claims to citizenship in 1 Samuel 17 should inspire children in contemporary society to claim their right to participate in justice-seeking actions. This is more urgent considering the challenges of climate change, poverty, war, and the unequal world. For instance, Cherish et al. observe the ways in which children's voices are mostly excluded in health policy discussions in South Africa (2019:616). However, in recent years adolescents began to raise their voices on environmental crisis issues. Thus, the Friday #Climatestrike campaigns that take place in some of the schools as well as the 'Youth-led litigation against the South African Government and private sector' on children's health are a few initiatives led by children and young people. But there is a call for more children to raise their voices and participate as active citizens on issues of health and climate change. In South Africa, the struggle against apartheid could not have been successful without children and young people who participated in the 1976 student protests. Cherish argues that South Africa 'needs its own brand of youth that stands up against environmental destruction' (2019:618). Just like David in 1 Samuel 17, when read from the childist perspective spoke in ways that challenge adultism and empire, children can claim their voice and agency on issues that threaten their world.

## Representation as a right to make a difference

A fully-child centred approach to representation recognises children as 'socially different' human beings who possess the ability and the right to make a difference in their world and that of adults. Thus, there should be an 'interdependent dialogue' between adults and children for the moral renewal of society. Children should not be excluded from moral discourse and it should take place in the language that children would understand. Thus, the call for social and political representation of children should include 'the right to make a difference' in society.

From the childist perspective, when David in 1 Samuel 17:24 asks the soldiers (adults), 'What will a man get for

killing this Philistine and ending his defiance of Israel' (NIV), David was engaging in interdependent dialogue to defeat Goliath. Even though he was socially different (in that he was a child) to the extent that his older brother asked him 'What are you doing around here anyway?' He demanded, 'What about those sheep you're supposed to be looking after?', David insisted and asked the same question regarding the reward he would gain for killing Goliath. From a childist perspective, David was claiming his right to make a difference for the 'whole' of Israel's society. In 1 Samuel 17:32, David tells Saul 'Don't worry about this Philistine, I'll go and fight him' (NIV). Although David was different physically and socially, he wanted to be a difference-maker for both adults and children. In the South African context, there is a need to go beyond dialogue about the rights of protecting children into having an interdependent and intergenerational dialogue about the right of children to make a difference in society.

## Conclusion

Reading 1 Samuel 17 through the lens of child representation helps the reader locate David as a child who is involved in the efforts of defeating war and empire. Childism does not argue that children are interdependent from adults but instead, both (adults and children) are equal partners in shaping a new world. This study used the concept of representation within childist studies to show the ways in which children are more than rights holders but they are also interpreters of their world and that of others. David in 1 Samuel 17 has been demonstrated as a child who claimed his voice, agency, and representation. When 1 Samuel 17 is read from a childist perspective, it inspires children and young people in South Africa to partner with adults in change-making and justice-seeking solutions. Furthermore, from a childist approach, this narrative restores the voices of children that are hidden in biblical texts and Bible commentaries.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The author declares that no financial or personal relationships exist that may have inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

### Author's contributions

Z.N. is the sole author of this research article.

### Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human participants.

### Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author, and the publisher.

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