WHO'S AFRAID OF CHILDREN?

HELEN BROCKLEHURST

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Who's Afraid of Children?

Children, Conflict and International Relations

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For children, whoever they may be

Chapter 1

Children

Beginnings

If children are people under 18 years old, it may be said that they form half of the world's population. Age however, in many respects, is not sufficient in itself as an indicator of childhood, nor does it illustrate why such persons are potentially receiving or deserving of different treatment throughout this time. In fact there is no single or agreed definition of childhood recognized or acted upon worldwide. As a unique and transient period of intense physical, mental, emotional and spiritual development; a time span delineated differently across and within communities and cultures; a managed societal or economic initiation; and a portal to romanticized and marketable evocations, images and memories, the consideration of childhood presents a unique empirical and theoretical challenge. Children are shaped not only by their underdevelopment as persons, but by conceptions earned and bestowed by the many individuals and groups who hold expectations of children, individually, collectively, simultaneously, arbitrarily and even contradictorily.

For the purposes of this book, however, all those considered to be children and childlike, are of interest. The construction or the image of a child, invoked in the minds of those fighting for their 'women and children' for example, is important to this discussion. It is also true that people can remain forever children in the eyes of their parents, regardless of age, as evidenced in the Latin American protest movement *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* whose grown-up children 'disappeared' during Argentine military rule. The choice of bestowed identity is of interest here despite the ambiguity.

The formal study of childhood, itself a young discipline, is another vital entry point. Childhood is often a clearly subdivided life phase though across different cultures and contexts these divisions may have no exact correspondence especially in later childhood. For the purposes of this book, all ages and stages of childhood are relevant. In the English language alone we may speak of early childhood, middle childhood and adolescence and 'baby', 'infant', 'child', 'teenager' and 'youth' to describe a spectrum of immature individuals with associated qualities and roles. As one identifies older persons, the terms 'child', 'juvenile', 'minor', 'youth' and even 'person' can be found interchangeably in international and customary law. The precise term used may also subtly bestow a social and political context. Youth describes a relatively older child though its use often suggests pejorative adult capabilities, notably in terms of the threat of physical strength and potential

criminality.¹ The category of youth is thus included in this analysis of childhood by extension and because these social and political associations also inform the concept of child. 'Childhood' is clearly a concept which can be made and unmade. Through Military Orders imposed by Israel for example, Palestinians have been exclusively reclassified as adults from the age of sixteen. In Northern Ireland children throwing stones at the armed forces were described in the press as 'violent youths' or 'innocent boys' almost arbitrarily. Explicit or sensationalized portrayals of children in these political settings often unwittingly describe them as having *lost* their childhood. The idea that childhood and politics are mutually exclusive is one of the central building blocks of the book. No attempt to create a universal or comprehensive conception of the child will be made.

Concepts

In major works that attempt to conceptualize childhood, authors engaging in historical enquiries often admit to frustration with partial evidence and inconclusive arguments.² It appears uncommon for past societies to have recorded much of the nature and boundaries of this life phase, leaving us with a fragmented history, and particularly limited historical sources as lamented by Lloyd de Mause, in *The History of Childhood* (1974). This sustained the historical adage that 'the things that really matter are hardly ever committed to paper'.³ Philip Aries' work, *Centuries of Childhood*, was the first historical study which advanced the notion of the modern 'conception' of childhood recognized in the last several centuries. He argued that the child is a contemporary concept of modern society. His crucial contention is that until the late seventeenth century there was no concept of childhood. The so called pre-modern ages distinguished only infants from adults, had no institutions to support the maturation process, and seemingly did not hold the child beyond infancy to be a separate or significant life stage.

David Archard, cautions against this view arguing that Aries cannot prove that pre-modern society lacked an awareness of children as different from adults, he merely shows that these societies held neither our present day conception of the child, nor the visible social support structures that we recognize in support of this conception.

¹ See for example Monique Marks (2001), *Young Warriors: Youth Politics, Identity and Violence in South Africa* (Witswatersrand University Press).

² For histories of childhood see: Urie Bronfenbrenner, *Two Worlds of Childhood – USA and USSR* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971); Philip Aries, *Centuries of Childhood* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973); Lloyd de Mause, *The History of Childhood* (London: Souvenir, 1976); Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800*; (New York: Harper and Row, 1977); Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent–Child Relations from 1500–1900* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983); Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (London and New York, Longman, 1995).

³ De Mause, *op. cit.*, preface.

The presence of childhood – or the arrival of modern conceptions of childhood – is thus heavily contested as historical fact. In the present day, by comparison, our awareness or certainty over children as different to adults is seemingly indisputable. Many, at least from Western vantage points, would argue that we now have child-centered society and that since the end of the cold war in particular the child has become the quintessential icon or projection of apparent liberal values.

Archard, a theorizer of children's rights explains that '[t]he *concept* of children requires that children be distinguishable from adults in respect of some unspecified set of attributes. We may all then have a concept of them. A *conception* of childhood is a specification of those attributes'⁴ and may be clearly deducible from their treatment and from legislation. Archard then identifies three aspects of conceptions of childhood, which are useful in separating out its form and content. These are 'boundaries' of childhood, its beginning and end; 'dimensions' of childhood, such as cultural, legal and social relativisms (which may end at different times), and the 'divisions' within childhood, that is, sub units of childhood.⁵ Archard crucially argues that a very specific conception of the child that has dominated Western philosophical and political thought still operates today: that is the child is thought of, or described, as 'a comparative negative: an individual who is not yet an adult'.⁶

This view has a long 'enlightened' trajectory, and few dissenters. The dominant understanding of children, first employed by Western thinkers such as John Locke, clearly takes adulthood 'as a state of being', and from this 'childhood is correspondingly clearly defined against, and set apart from and below adulthood'.⁷ This developmental⁸ model of childhood conceives of adulthood as an achieved state. The child, for example, is thought not yet to achieve rational capabilities and has insufficient knowledge to make good decisions. Although attempts to quantify and apply time scales to the development of knowledge and rationality remain unresolved,⁹ we continue to compare children in this way, with an adult being coterminous with a mature or developed norm.

Within the developmental model of childhood, there are two ways of seeing the maturation process, though these lead to the same outcome and neither are particularly generous. Either, it can be argued, that prior to becoming adults children have essential 'child qualities' and need specific nurturing and teaching in order

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁵ David Archard, *Children, Rights and Childhood*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 31.

⁶ Geraldine Van Beuren, *The International Law on the Rights of the Child* (Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1995), p. 33.

⁷ David Archard, (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁸ On the developmental model see Archard *op. cit.*, pp. 34–6; William A. Corsaro, *The Sociology of Childhood* (Thousand Oaks, California: Pine Forge Press, 1997); and Jim, Goddard *et al.* (eds) (2005), *The Politics of Childhood: International Perspectives, Contemporary Developments* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan).

⁹ For a discussion see Michael Freeman, *Rights and Wrongs of Children* (London: Frances Pinter, 1983).

to change these into, or substitute them for, adult qualities; or, the child may be understood to be a partial or a lesser version of the adult, with adult qualities in place but yet to develop without assistance. Both views share however the anticipation of a time of end, when full adulthood is attained. In the former interpretation children's qualities are gradually transformed, in the latter, adulthood outgrows childhood. Critically neither view holds that childlike qualities may continue into adulthood, or that qualities are shared.

David Archard argues that the former developmental model of childhood, with its emphasis on the adult template and sudden transition is still privileged. He asserts that our conception of the child 'has been to a considerable degree infused with what are essentially myths or imaginative projections, deriving from a mixture of cultural and ideological sources'.¹⁰ He goes on to say '[i]t is sometimes hard to separate the modern conception proper from what is in fact a symbolic ideal of childhood'. Of the modern conception recognized by Aries he writes (emphasis added):

Children neither work nor play alongside adults; *they do not participate in the adult world of law and politics*. Their world is innocent where the adult world is knowing; and so on. We now insist upon a sharp distinction between the behavior demanded of children and that expected of adults; what is thought appropriate treatment of children is distinct from that of adults. There is a marked division of roles and responsibilities.¹¹

Archard believes that the realization of a separate world for children to inhabit further fuels assumptions about their difference from adults. He questions this and asserts that there are scientific and cultural origins to the perception of separateness. In short, he alleges that children have been defined from the standpoint of adults and therefore perceived as the opposite of adults, a conception that privileges adult qualities:

The ideal adult is equipped with certain cognitive capacities, rational, physically independent, autonomous, has a sense of identity and is conscious of its beliefs and desires, and thus able to make informed free choices for which it can be held personally responsible ... Childhood is defined as that which lacks the capacities, skills and powers of adulthood ... If childhood has virtues they are such only because of their very inappropriateness to adult life.¹²

The main alternative view of childhood suggested by Archard, is a process of maturation that has no point of complete separation from adulthood. 'Adulthood' can include and retain childlike qualities, and correspondingly virtues or disadvantages of adulthood may also be found throughout childhood. This model of gradual transition, which is more likely to be found outside of the West, makes clear that the child is as much a state of mind as a stage of physical maturity. There is no clear

¹⁰ Archard (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 37.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 39.

division between adults and children, and childlike and adult qualities and behavior can be held simultaneously. Archard writes:

The individual can become more and more of an adult, but there is no guarantee that ageing brings with it maturity as understood normatively ... to that extent childhood is construed not so much as an actual period in one's life, but more as a metaphorical immaturity which can be present to some extent throughout a lifetime.¹³

Writers such as Farson have similarly argued that a modern-day conception of childhood is actually invented and forcibly so, through a desire to distinguish between adult and infantile qualities in ideological constructs, which in turn give adults greater powers.¹⁴ As Archard echoes: 'it may well be our judgment as to what matters in being an adult which explains why we have the particular conception of childhood we do'.¹⁵ Conceptions of childhood are lost and found at various junctures of history, in different locations and cultures, and within particular conditions of socio-economic climate. Perceptions of childhood and adulthood may vary with the (adult) priorities of society, particularly political priorities, as I later show. The following example is one illustration of how war acted as a catalyst for the separation and medicalization of the life phase of childhood. War was in this case 'good for children'.

Infantry Formula

Western liberal-democratic states, and indeed most cultures, recognize children as developing individuals in need of separate protection and health care until they are physiologically less vulnerable. However this simple division is relatively recent and the institutionalization of childcare in addition to 'healthcare', can be seen to have originated from specific links made between a population's health and the national interest in times of crisis. At the turn of the twentieth century, in what was a demanding era of imperialism, conquest and colonization, state strength and healthy, productive adults were vital. High infant mortality rates and slow population growth in Western Europe were thus a cause of concern and studied in a climate of military anxiety.¹⁶ The Boer War and the First World War (WWI) further weakened populations and the cohort of young infantrymen were particularly frail. Scientific scrutiny of younger adults traced such soldier's vulnerability to inadequate care and nutrition in early life.¹⁷ Consequently further separation of children's lives from adults, from infancy into childhood, so that they might benefit from additional health care, was advocated.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁴ Richard Farson, *Birthrights* (London: Collier Macmillan, 1974), p. 31.

¹⁵ Archard (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 29.

¹⁶ See for example Maria Sophia Quine, *Population Politics in Twentieth Century Europe* (London: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁷ Valerie Fildes, Lara Marks and Hilary Marland (eds), *Women and Children First: International and Infant Welfare 1870–1945* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 1 and 97.

The need to regenerate society in this way led to specialized medicine for children, specific nurturing activities, and the popularization on the home front of an ideal, healthy childhood. Medical advances grew into child welfare structures, as is evident in the separation of children's health and welfare provisions. Though there is a medical and pediatric basis for this separation, it was not observed until war necessitated its consideration. It was thus a combination of development theory, culture and political prudence that led to increased separation and nurturing of the child in much of Western Europe.¹⁸ The appeal of scientific conclusions concretized the public perception of childhood as a newly discovered but *natural* time of additional nurturing, and concomitantly, protection from adult experiences. To the present day this separation of children is sustained by behavioral analysis of what is natural and healthy for children of certain ages and stages.

Essential Childhood

Certainly, maturation is both a distinguishing feature of children and, importantly, one that affords them different or extra needs to adults. However physical development, though in many ways a defining characteristic of *childhood*, often continues into adulthood, finally stopping near the age of 25. Perhaps, then, there could be specified a certain degree of under-development which defines 'childhood'. And indeed though cell renewal and growth continues throughout both periods it is only during a certain span of early childhood that the physical *appearance and development* of particular vital organs, including the brain, takes place. This fact is significant in itself, pinpointing one of the very few characteristics that children do not share with other dependent persons. Concomitant with this threshold of 'vital' development are risks. Before the age of five, for example, a child's undeveloped body will absorb more toxins than for the rest of their entire adult lifetime. Their brains are also rapidly developing, leading to less tangible risks inherent in their immaturity, and common in war:

While an adult may be severely affected by a traumatic experience and as a result suffer some personality alteration, a child's personality, in the absence of pre-existing development, may not be altered, but actually developed by a traumatic event. Any or all of a child's cognitive development may not only be altered but actually developed.¹⁹

Interestingly, in terms of both moral and cognitive development, children then reach levels comparable with adults between the ages of twelve and fourteen.

¹⁸ See for example Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of the Child and Mother* (London: Virago, 1983).

¹⁹ G. Van Bueren, 'Opening Pandora's Box' in G. Van Bueren (ed.), *Childhood Abused: Protecting Children Against Torture, Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment and Punishment* (Dartmouth: Ashgate, 1998) p. 60.

Despite huge variations in the span of childhood experienced world-wide, such factors may help to explain why a majority of cultures hold a conception of a very young child or infant and deem a prepubescent person, that is up to the age of about twelve, to be unquestionably a child in at least some respects. Middle childhood, however, from approximately seven to eleven years may vary enormously and revolve around many roles and expectations also held of adults.

Major Variations in Minors

The most common marker of the boundary of childhood is the ‘age of majority’, which is not *directly* a physical quality so much as a social, religious, cultural or legal device by which societies identify the transition to adulthood. There is not necessarily correlation in its many levels of attainment.²⁰ Biological or mental issues of underdevelopment are not absent from this identification, of course. As the ‘minority’ of a community, children are most frequently deemed to lack the capacities necessary for running their lives as full members of it, comparable to the cohort of mentally impaired adults. In the West, majority typically functions as societies’ means of acknowledging mature intellectual capabilities and legally endowing a child with membership of society in terms of citizenship and an entitlement to vote. In most of the world’s sovereign states this is set at eighteen years.²¹ The age of majority is also a symbolic stage of becoming an adult. The work of Boyden and Levison is worth citing here to capture its diversity and significance in relation to childhood:

Many different kinds of criteria – although seldom age – are used to demarcate childhood. These criteria include the commencement of work, end of schooling, onset of menarche, betrothal, and marriage amongst others. ... Further, children in different social classes within the same society may reach adulthood at different ages, depending on their social and economic roles.²²

Several processes of majority may unfold sequentially and simultaneously. Cadet soldiers in the UK for example may marry with parental consent at sixteen, make life, risk life and take life at 17, but not legally watch a violent or pornographic movie under any circumstance for another year. However as Boyden and Levison note, ‘because they raise children’s social and economic status and constitute public affirmation of community membership, such transitions far outweigh the universal age-based threshold in their significance for children’.²³

²⁰ Guy Goodwin-Gill and Ilene Cohn, *Child Soldiers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²² Jo Boyden and Deborah Levison, *Children as Economic and Social Actors in the Development Process*, Working Paper 1, Stockholm: Expert Group on Development Issues, 2000, p. 28.

²³ *Ibid.*

Physical strength and labor capacity may mark a transition into adulthood, or at least partial adulthood. Occupation or apprenticeship may serve as a practical illustration of when adulthood is bestowed, or childhood qualities lost. In Afghanistan, an average life expectancy of 44 years²⁴ made it essential for community survival that most children learned and performed the same tasks as adults from an early age. In agrarian societies in particular, all physically capable people are an important economic asset, and are rapidly initiated into specific skills and social relationships. Across the world children, especially girls from the ages of six upwards, perform informal tasks at home. The age of a child worker does not necessarily render their employment exploitative. Many children imitate and learn the skills of work by choice and in ways that do not hinder their growth or development. Their working environment may be the home or the land outside the home, and their labor may form a positive part of their development, nurturing and education. In the West child work which occurs instead of formal education is generally recognized as an infringement of childhood rights and freedoms. For many in the West, childhood is seen as a natural period of protracted immaturity, play and learning.²⁵ Through this model, up to a billion people under the age of fifteen are considered to be experiencing a premature adulthood or a curtailed childhood. This conception of imperfect childhood would seem to weigh heavier in Western minds, than the conditions that prompt it. There has been similar indifference in most educational literature as to how work also functions as learning.²⁶ A child's physical and mental growth is however undoubtedly inhibited or permanently damaged by the labor often necessitated by absolute poverty.

The age of majority may also be coterminous with puberty. A sexual (hence 'adult') capability and/or readiness for marriage can allow the individual to fully contribute to the good of the wider community and its traditions. A religious ritual may be performed to mark this at a set age, 13 for example in Judaism, or later in the Islamic faith where the age of majority tends to be related to individual development. Puberty may begin from the ages of eight and sometimes earlier in non-Western cultures. Owing to the importance of puberty as a boundary in numerous cultures, sexual innocence and sexual incapacity are widely associated with or synonymous with childhood. These qualities clearly vary from child to child however, and puberty does not equate with loss of sexual innocence.

²⁴ Molly Moore, John Ward-Anderson, and Chris McGreal, 'Fighting to Rescue a Lost Generation', *The Guardian*, 29 April 1995, p. 15.

²⁵ Martin Woodhead, Paul Light and Ronnie Carr, *Open University: Child Development in a Social Context*. Vol. 3, *Growing up in a Changing Society* (London: Routledge, 1991) p. 3.

²⁶ See for example George Kent, *Children in the International Economy* (London: Macmillan, 1995).

Law as Surrogacy

In Great Britain until comparatively recently, 'the child had no legal protection as an individual for fear that such protection would violate the sacredness of the family'.²⁷ The present-day conception of the child in the West is framed by a rights-based culture in which expectations about children and adults are tightly legislated in terms of adults', especially parents', responsibilities and duties. As children cannot themselves be bearers of rights according to traditional legal philosophy, the existence of laws themselves serve to act as a construction of childhood. As John Eekelaar notes:

the central feature which traditionally marks minority status is that adults have a generalized legal power (exercisable either by parents or by legal authorities) to impose a course of action on minors on the basis of their assessment of the minor's best interests.²⁸

The paradigm of 'best interests of the child' has led legal debate on children into the twenty-first century. Its wording alone implies guardianship and separation rather than partnership or agency. As Jo Boyden has argued, a gradual coalescence of factors, from capitalist development, changes in demography, Christianity, the role of the family and welfare laws have led to a climate in which the child is nurtured and protected from itself and from adult's society, as if from 'adult pollution'.²⁹ Indeed the entire legal apparatus surrounding children can be characterized as being about 'freedom from', rather than 'freedom to'. 'Freedom to' is associated with departure from childhood. That said, the former concept is not yet realized either; as Sara Ruddick notes: 'when you see children as demanding care, the reality of their vulnerability and the necessity of a caring response seem unshakeable.' Yet 'the presence of a child does not guarantee its care'.³⁰

Childhood has also become associated with both legal protection and engagement with a sequential attainment of various rights. In terms of national and international law, age is the main criteria for distinguishing an adult from a child, or 'minor'. There are then also different ages at which someone is to be regarded as a child for the varying purposes of the law, such as criminal responsibility. There is also variance between national law, international humanitarian law and international and regional human rights instruments, in defining the parameters of childhood.³¹ In Argentina, children are protected from the moment of conception and hold property rights from

²⁷ 'Child Welfare', *Chambers Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 3 (London), p. 400.

²⁸ John Eekelaar, 'The Interests of the Child and the Child's wishes: the role of dynamic self-determinism.' in Alston, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

²⁹ Jo Boyden, 'Childhood and the Policy Makers: A Comparative Perspective on the Globalisation of Childhood', in Jones, A. and Prout, A. (eds), *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* (1990), pp. 186 and 191.

³⁰ Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1990), p. 18.

³¹ Guy Goodwin-Gill, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

this time.³² Are newborns or even the unborn categorizable as children? Children in many American states for example cannot marry, vote, make a will or make a valid contract but can serve in the armed forces. Child marriage is discouraged but not outlawed in Muslim societies of Pakistan and Egypt.³³ In India it is legal for a child aged 10 to be fully employed in industry even if it is hazardous. In the United States, there is a minimum age at which children have criminal responsibility, varying from 15, to 7 in New York, to no minimum age in twenty-seven states.³⁴ Children may be deemed incapable of making decisions about their sexuality (as they may be taken advantage of) at an age when they may still choose to fight for their country (and not be taken advantage of). The issue of children's recruitment has fuelled perhaps most debate over whether young people between the ages of 15 and 18 are in fact adults or children.

It may be argued an internationalization of child care norms and rules, culminating in *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) created a coherent and universal approach to the problem of securing children's rights. The Convention states that 'children, because of their vulnerability, need special care and protection', and also that 'the child by reason of his physical and mental immaturity needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection'.³⁵ It is the most ratified human rights treaty in history: ratified by all countries except the USA and Somalia. Issues of cultural specificity however complicate the treaty's application in its current arguably rigid form. A Western and liberal model of childhood employed in the convention is identified for criticism. Debates over conceptions of children are however extremely complex beyond the evident differences in conceptions held across different cultures and jurisdictions. For example, Japan's ancient and family philosophies of harmony and unity uniquely connect mothers and children. Consequently, the Convention's requirement of parents' *partnership* with children are not accepted in Japanese society as they may be elsewhere.³⁶

Perhaps more importantly the concept of the child is incommensurable with the concept of rights. In the Western legal framework children have been seen as people without responsibility, for whom obligations, that is the obverse of rights, are not applicable. Children, having no obligations to others, therefore hold a different claim to rights than do adults. In summary: '[o]bligations are the obverse of rights ... the only exception to this is the rights of children and especially small children. They

³² Cecilia P. Grosman, 'Argentina – Children's Rights in Family Relationships: The Gulf between Law and Social Reality', in Michael Freeman (ed.), *Children's Rights: A Comparative Perspective* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1996), p. 7.

³³ John. L. Esposito, *Women in Muslim Family Law* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1982).

³⁴ Charlotte Faltermayer, 'What Is Justice for a Sixth Grade Killer?' *Time*, 6 April 1998, p. 48.

³⁵ Defence For Children International, *The Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Geneva, 1990).

³⁶ Yukiko Matsushima, 'Controversies and Dilemmas: Japan confronts the Convention', in Michael Freeman (ed.), *Children's Rights: A Comparative Perspective op. cit.*

have only rights. The obligations are ours and those of society'.³⁷ This assumption is contradicted by many children's experiences. In agrarian societies where children form the backbone of the workforce supporting their family, 'obligations' has a different significance. Children may be obligated to repay their families in return for their right to guardianship. In South Asia, Hindu law, describes children as holders of duties and obligations to the family and community and though these are not formalized legally they are central to tradition and community stability. Sons may be favored in a system of 'sonship', patriarchal or patrilineal inheritance, and hold the most important obligations from an early age.³⁸

As David Archard argues: 'the young have been denied rights because, being young, they are presumed to lack some capacities necessary for the possession of rights'.³⁹ Until recently it has been assumed that children are less morally capable of making judgments than adults. This may be a key area where children's rights, and consequently the parameters and experience of childhood, have been significantly shaped by adult conceptions. The most radical development in the legal concept of the child therefore has been the realization that the child has a degree of self-determination and autonomy, and can be assisted into making choices rather than being the passive object of concern.⁴⁰ Being able to do something should not however be conflated with doing the right thing.

However, laws are culturally bound, may not be adhered to, and, in a sense, illustrate only idealistic projections of how child and adult roles should be maintained. Laws which prohibit particular activities may be subject to pragmatic alteration in times of crisis, thus allowing for greater use of children as a resource. Ages of military conscription and juvenile delinquency may be lowered in order to make recruits and victims of both kinds. One fundamental extension to the study of children's rights has been the recognition of different levels of care and guardianship that children receive based on their sex.

Gender Issues

One cannot account for dimensions and boundaries of childhood without looking at the role of gender. Gendered values may create separate experiences of childhood, determining its duration, opportunities and quality. Children's roles may be determined by their relative physical strength, sexual development, and gendered values held across society as a whole. The gender of a child may be the single

³⁷ Simone Veil, quoted by Tarzie Vittachi, in *Making Reality of Children's Rights* (Stockholm: Radda Barnen, 1989), p. 53.

³⁸ Savitri Goonesekere, 'The Best Interests of the Child: A South Asian Perspective', in Alston *op. cit.*, p. 129.

³⁹ David Archard, *Children Rights and Childhood* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 58.

⁴⁰ Michael Freeman (ed.), *Children's Rights: A Comparative Perspective* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1996).

most important explanation for differentiated experiences of childhood and explain variations of child status between cultures and within cultures.

Despite a legal basis from which to protect girls, discrimination against girl children is pervasive with millions of families resorting to infanticide of girls to make sure their one child is a boy. In China's 2000 census there were an estimated 19 million more boys than girls and a sex ratio of 100 girls to 120 boys, achieved through sex-selective abortion and a nutrition rights and care bias against girls. The perceived difference between a boy and a girl in cultural terms is often then a matter of life or death. In India, a boy will often be fed first and in the greatest amounts as he is valued and more useful to his family or community.⁴¹ '[T]he apartheid of gender' starts early.⁴² Children are both commoditized, and made vulnerable by gendered values within specific cultural and economic frameworks. In the Philippines, patriarchal society also creates this discrimination of male children over female children, reflected in their survival rates. A Filipino 'child prostitute', made pregnant by a US service member, may for example exchange a female infant in return for outstanding rent. If the baby is male, she is more likely to insist on keeping the child.⁴³

(M)others

However, it is also obvious that experiences of childhood can be represented as if feminine for both girls and boys. Physical and emotional weakness can be described as a feminine and developmental phase that boys will 'grow out of'. The refrain 'Big boys don't cry' is still heard. Children's and women's bestowed qualities overlap in crucial areas perhaps leading to the feminization of childhood. Both women and children may be thought of as physically weaker, less rational and more emotional than (adult) males. In short, girl children are expected to maintain their girl-like qualities, most typically for the caring role of motherhood. In addition, children are closely associated with the mother and the maternal sphere or the realm of the family or home. In virtually all cultures mothers do overall spend more time with infants and newborn children than do fathers.⁴⁴ But though boys begin life in what may be thought of as a feminine sphere they are also more likely to be expected to lose any associated weakness and childishness, in readiness for masculine/adult roles.

Cynthia Enloe notes that the phrase 'womenandchildren' rolls easily off network tongues because in network minds women are family members rather than

⁴¹ Radhika Balakrishnan, 'The Wider Context of Sex Selection and the Politics of Abortion in India', in Gita Sen and Rachel C. Snow (eds), *Power and Decision: The Social Control of Reproduction* (Boston: Harvard School of Health, 1994), pp. 268–70.

⁴² Fildes, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁴³ Anuradha Vittachi, *Stolen Childhood, In Search of the Rights of the Child* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1989), p. 28.

⁴⁴ Melvin Konner, *Childhood* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1991), p. 196.

independent actors, and presumed to be almost childlike in their innocence about international *realpolitik*.⁴⁵ The conflation of womanhood with motherhood ties children with women in a way that does not occur with men. Similarly, in many ways children are thought about in close connection with the female sphere, as natural consumers of a female sphere, and as therefore feminine regardless of their sex. The relationship between mother and child is an important component of the conception of childhood.

Aid agencies too have concretized this association of mothers with childhood. Mothers have been primarily represented as a physiological and emotional extension of the child; as indeed is correct in the sense that children's survival and sense of security is shared with their primary carers who are most likely to be mothers. In 1989 UNICEF (The United Nations' Children's Fund) realized that their commitment to helping children, was ineffective without also reaching mothers and potential mothers. At the Beijing Women's Conference, UNICEF advocated that:

Everything UNICEF does relates to women. You cannot run programmes for women without tackling the injustice that begins for girls in their infancy or even before birth. Children are not treated as individuals, they are considered in the relationship with their parents or guardians. The quality of life for children depends on the status of women.⁴⁶

The simultaneous direction of aid to children and mothers, in the absence of father figures, has also merely served to present mothers and children as a single, incapable unit, both subject to paternalist and protectionist politics. The absence of the mother in an image of a young child can sustain the concept of childhood as a time of vulnerability. Advertising consultants and fund-raisers for Oxfam maintain that in the context of famine images 'a child will bring in more than an adult, a girl child who cries will bring in more than a boy who does not'.⁴⁷

'Children' Having Children

Reproductive capability also marks a change in children's status within the community. A psychologist writing in a popular psychology text of the 1960s casually claims that '[t]he ability to cope with family life is seldom attained before the twenties'.⁴⁸ What precisely is meant by coping is not made clear. Across the world however, and in the more recent past in the West, the (desired) age of motherhood and fatherhood was and remains far lower than twenty. In Niger for example half of all women give birth

⁴⁵ Cynthia Enloe, *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War* (London: University of California Press, 1993), p. 166.

⁴⁶ *Children First*, op. cit., pp. 2 and 8.

⁴⁷ Patricia Holland, *What is a Child? Popular Images of Childhood* (London: Virago Press, 1992), p. 156.

⁴⁸ C. I. Sandstrom, *The Psychology of Childhood and Adolescence* (Great Britain: Pelican Books, 1968), p. 14.

before the age of 18.⁴⁹ Responsibility for a family may characterize the beginning of adulthood, if not the end of childhood. More developed or liberal societies such as the United States and Great Britain view 'children having children' as an anomaly, and for social commentators it is an opportune moment to question the stability and progress of the whole of society. In the West, the reasons for teenage motherhood are varied, and may be related to lack of education, and an impoverished life. In small, rural communities of Kentucky State, USA, poor health care has drastically shortened the average life expectancy, especially of women, placing expectations of marriage and motherhood on the girls remaining in the community. It is not unusual for girls here to become wives from age ten and mothers at age twelve. Society is however thought to be at fault for not protecting these children from these circumstances, and especially in not sustaining stable two-parent families, the perceived Western norm.

There are many examples in Britain and the United States of how the moral fabric of society becomes questionable if a child becomes pregnant, or children are found to be at home alone. The isolated child, without the buffer zone of the 'normal family', personifies helplessness and dependency, and calls society into question more than any other member of society. Although the notion of a family is itself a contested concept, the child is framed in terms of dependency on, and centrality to such guardians. The child as a mother is thus incongruous. These examples are in stark contrast however to the experience of young people in the other countries indeed the majority of young people who from an early age are effectively entrusted with the care of siblings. Of course this also takes place in the West, in the form of 'babysitting' or even play amongst siblings. This contradiction illustrates in part the fragility of seemingly uncontestable assumptions about children and their appropriate roles.

'Innocence'

The idea of innocence is impossible to ignore in any consideration of children or politics. Children are frequently cited as innocent or of losing innocence especially in a war zone. Rarely is the question asked 'Innocent of what?' Innocence and purity are two components of a conception of childhood which have gendered foundations.⁵⁰ It is contended by many that 'childhood innocence' is based on childhood being understood to be a time of *sexual* innocence.⁵¹ Such assumptions of innocence may be not only inaccurate, but also further debilitating for children. Archard suggests that such a concept of childhood thus *becomes* sexualized and 'connotes a purity, virginity, freshness and immaculateness which excites by the possibilities of defilement. As has been noted of many men who frequent prostitutes

⁴⁹ 'Youngest and oldest brides', *The Guardian*, 28 January 1996, p. 22.

⁵⁰ Erica Burman, 'Innocents Abroad: Western Fantasies of Childhood and the Iconography of Emergencies', in *Disasters*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1994, p. 240.

⁵¹ Archard (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 40.

or abduct children for sexual gratification: '[t]hey're chasing after a particular look. And sexual value is attached to youth'.⁵²

There is as yet no international agreement on what is unlawful sexual activity against children.⁵³ But publicity of child sexual abuse provokes a different and more powerful reaction by concerned groups than women's sexual abuse and slavery.⁵⁴ Children's enslavement is seen as more horrifying. 'This process distorts the reality of the situation, implying that it is tolerable to enslave women but not children.'⁵⁵ The discovery of Belgian girls who had been sexually abused, tortured and buried alive was hugely publicized and also served to draw attention to the world's first Congress Against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children which later convened in Stockholm. *Time* Magazine, described at length the 'outrage' of the global phenomenon of sexual exploitation of children, that 'dramatized the plight of children in peril everywhere'.⁵⁶ But *Newsweek* seemed to catch the true nature of the shock felt in its comment: '[f]or if it can happen in a rural village in a country as benign as Belgium, surely it can happen anywhere'.⁵⁷ 'The world's dirtiest business',⁵⁸ the child-sex trade was not addressed until such crimes were committed on children – and on children who were particularly innocent on *home* soil in Belgium. This suggests that concepts of the child are also parasitic on notions of state respectability and development. The mentality of Western sex offenders abroad, would seem to bear this out as they too do not imagine they are abusing 'children'. They may resort to cultural relativisms and misogynistic excuses, conceptualizing the foreign children they use as 'others' or early developers.

Innocence and purity are characteristics also rendered in constructed images and conceptions of children.⁵⁹ An allegation of abuse wielded almost exclusively at young people it is at best patronizing and at worst detrimental to development and rehabilitation, generating moral panic and rational paralysis in our attempts to form partnerships with children. These are perhaps the least considered and most opaque components of modern understandings of childhood. Jenny Kitzinger suggests that the child rendered as innocent and valued in this way further adds to their danger of becoming the idealized innocent of a certain male sexual desire – hairless,

⁵² Susan Greenberg, 'Children for sale', *Newsweek*, 2 September 1996, p. 11.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵⁴ Kathleen Barry, 'Pornography and the global exploitation of women', in Diane Bell and Renate Klein, *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed* (London: Zed Books, 1996), pp. 448–55.

⁵⁵ Robyn Rowland, 'Radical Feminism: History, Politics, Action' in Bell and Klein, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁵⁶ *Time*, 2 September 1996, frontcover.

⁵⁷ Susan H. Greenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁵⁸ *Newsweek*, 2 September 1996, frontcover.

⁵⁹ Marina Warner, 'Outing of the family album', *Times Higher Education[al Supplement]*, 4 December 1998, p. 25.

vulnerable, weak, dependent and uncorrupted.⁶⁰ Such images of the child may be playing a central role in anchoring conceptions of the child and childhood.

Images and Iconography

The imagined child, most often realized in images and literary sources, is an important indicator of expectations of childhood.

the familiar typology of childhood includes the energetic boy and the seductive girl, the dependent child in need of protection, the ignorant child in need of education, the playful child in the home and the violent child on the streets.⁶¹

It is an interesting fact that the images of beauty, or the aesthetic faces that we crave or are seduced by, are also typically identified as also young and feminine. The image of a child employed in visual culture is also often of a particular type. For example, the beautiful, feminine, infant child becomes the icon of vulnerability in war propaganda, polarizing and humanizing the threat, imploring protection. Propagandists retain infantile qualities even in depictions of older bodies, by making use of particular physical qualities. In Nazi and Soviet propaganda of World War Two (WWII), children were likely to be blonde, aesthetic, wide-eyed and pleading to receive attention and or be cared for; small, pre-adolescent, silent and still, and isolated from a familial context.⁶² Such visual qualities also suggest purity, vulnerability, innocence and approachability.

As Archard explains, there has been a proliferation of the image of the child, not the everyday child but the aesthetic, pleasing, satisfying image of a young child. As a literary device and pictorial construct, it is used to provide contrast with the adult condition. As Archard notes:

the English literary exploration of childhood is no more than two centuries old, and that this exploration, has, in many ways, been an exploitation of childhood as a symbol for what is deemed to be missing from and degenerate about adulthood.⁶³

Images of childhood form a mainstay of nostalgic and sentimental recollection of better times; positive, innocent and free of pressure. Patricia Holland suggests that 'pictures of children are part of a set of interweaving narratives of childhood which are both public and private, and personal and social'. Holland asserts that within these images there are attempts to secure meanings within a structure of power.⁶⁴ In

⁶⁰ Jenny Kitzinger, quoted in Archard, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁶¹ Holland, *op. cit.*, p. 12; Patricia Holland, *Picturing Childhood: The Myth of the Child in Popular Imagery*, (London: I B Tauris, 2004).

⁶² Toby Clarke, *Art and Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: The Political Image in the Age of Mass Culture* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997).

⁶³ Archard (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁶⁴ Holland, *op. cit.*

the West, innocence of adult experience and threat are thought to be self-evident in the concept of the child, particularly the young child. This is evidenced in the near exclusive pictorial use of the child in the Western media to illustrate or epitomize crises and disasters, thus simultaneously compounding societal and childhood innocence or degradation.

Victims

Focusing on the plight of the child is a technique frequently employed in the reporting of international news and foreign conflicts. Crises in far away places intrude on our consciousness through the work of the media. The children whose faces and terror are zoomed in on, are part of what Erica Burman describes as the iconography of emergencies, or disaster pornography.⁶⁵ Children's faces demand responses. Positioned alone and out of place in a situation that is not of their making, they are a compelling illustration of wrongdoing. Children are sole agents of disaster aesthetics, allowed to illustrate a story because they actually explain very little. Particular images of children seem to symbolize or concretize at least the horror of a situation in the mind of the observer. Pictures of starving children dominated the film footage of the Ethiopian famine in 1985. When Russian troops invaded Chechnya in 1995, pictures of blood-smeared Chechen children were on the front pages of most British newspapers.⁶⁶ Similarly, British reporting of the Rwandan massacres has used the case studies of children to portray the crisis in graphical clarity.⁶⁷ The questions remain: is the child that is represented in the news, the same as the child in the societies in question, and how is that choice of representation intended to inform the observer?

Other individuals if not whole sectors of population can be attributed with childlike qualities or personified as infantile. Reducing different and 'other' people to children was a visual tool in the propaganda of the British Empire. Today, the images of these same developing countries are also presented, as both full of children, and childlike. Holland asserts that the growing awareness of humanitarian issues in the West, is fuelled by the desire to protect such children. She writes that consequently, this desire may have far-reaching implications for these children and their society:

women, Black people and the whole of the Third World are among those who stand in a childish relation to the exercise of power. The non-white nations are regularly represented as if they themselves lack potency, and it is among the children of the developing countries – in stark contrast to the well-fed, well-equipped mini-consumers of the domestic image – that we find the most frequent pictures of childhood suffering.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Burman (1994), *op. cit.*

⁶⁶ Andrew Higgins, 'Yeltsin takes over army', *The Independent*, 12 January 1995, p. 1.

⁶⁷ See for example, Jenny Matthews, 'A holocaust we chose not to see', *The Observer*, 2 April 1995, p. 14; and Lindsey Hilsum, 'Rwanda's time of rape returns to haunt thousands', *The Observer*, 26 February 1995, p. 17.

⁶⁸ Holland, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

The condition of children and the length of childhood are strongly correlated with the condition of a society or state. It may, for example, be asserted that children who are exposed to society's ills have *lost* their childhood.⁶⁹ Likewise, security, development and progress can be clearly epitomized by the condition and health of children. Holland asserts that 'the western public has become familiar with an imagery of extremity at the expense of context, and the wrenching of emotion at the expense of understanding'.⁷⁰ Children have remained at the center of images of hardship as photographers work to create the most striking images. The charity: *Save the Children* requires shocking images to gain fast results. Through their visual representation and manipulation, the apparent 'truth' they possess also simplifies to the point of obscurity, their context.

'Children may express emotions that are universal, while remaining separate from those other qualities that make humanity so diverse.'⁷¹ Through such use of the victim-child to headline disasters, an entire support network, perhaps the family, and community and state to which a suffering child belongs is mentally by-passed in the viewer. In the visual absence of other authority figures, a temporary surrogacy by the viewer is also encouraged. 'Iraqi children are dying – you can save them.'⁷² In media stories, the public are then congratulated on rescuing the children, shown corresponding 'before' and 'after' faces, and thus the beginning and end of a foreign disaster.⁷³ Children are inherently victim-like and help reduce a story into sound bites and essentials.⁷⁴ Aid and development are conflated and femininity and childish dependency are collapsed to evoke sympathy.⁷⁵ Erica Burman and Holland share the view that children act as visual 'indices of vulnerability that transcend culture and politics'.⁷⁶ Moeller too has uncovered systematic and often distorted use of children in international news reports regardless of their actual relevance to the story.⁷⁷

Containment

Above all, the imagery drawn on above, 'displays the social and psychic effort that goes into negotiating the difficult distinction between adult and child. There

⁶⁹ See for example, 'Growing up Scared: How America's Kids are Robbed of Their Childhood', *Newsweek*, 10 January 1994, frontispiece and p. 37.

⁷⁰ Holland *op cit.*, p. 151.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁷² *The Independent*, 6 March 1998, Headline, p. 1.

⁷³ For example, the widely publicized rescue of Irma from Bosnia in 1995, and Mariam Hamza from Iraq 'by' Labour MP George Galloway in 1998.

⁷⁴ Holland, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

⁷⁵ Burman (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 242; Burman, Erica (1996), 'Constructing and Deconstructing Childhood: Images of Children and Charity Appeals', in J. Haworth (ed.), *Psychological Research: Innovative Methods and Strategies* (London: Routledge).

⁷⁶ Burman (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 243.

⁷⁷ Susan D. Moeller, 'The Media's Use of Children in the Telling of International News', *Press/Politics*, Vol. 7, no. 1, 2002, pp. 36–56.

is an active struggle to maintain childhood – if not actual children – as pure and uncontaminated’.⁷⁸ As I shall show throughout the book, this negotiation of meaning is inherent in the projection of a *contained* concept of the child, in a world society where multiplicities of concepts are possible. Holland summarizes the idea of containment as follows:

... yet the public discourse of which imagery plays so important a part strives to produce a childhood which, as well as being different from adulthood, is its obverse, a depository for many precious qualities adulthood needs but cannot tolerate as part of itself. The dichotomy child/adult is linked to other dichotomies that dominate our thought: nature/culture, primitiveness/civilization, emotion/reason. In each pair the dominant term seeks to understand and control the subordinate, keeping it separate but using it for its own enrichment.⁷⁹

As Erica Burman notes, ‘discourses of childhood are central to definitions of adulthood: each relies upon and secures the boundaries of the other’. She notes that key areas that threaten to blur this boundary include children’s ‘knowledge’ (especially sexual knowledge) and activity (especially political, economic and violent activity).⁸⁰ I argue that the concept of the ‘political’ in particular is formulated and projected as if separate from children. This *containment* is to an extent, recognizable in the study of childhood and of children’s development. This shift in understanding may be the narrow end of a wedge that firmly opens up concepts of childhood and adulthood and with this destabilizes many other social identities.

The current paradigm shift underway in childhood studies shows that we are late in recognizing the multiple ways in which children have agency and power. By agency I mean the ways in which they are able to participate and inform social practices. By power I mean their agency and their contribution. This new phase in the study of childhood is itself in its infancy. It is also represented in popular culture and the media as a ‘crisis’ in childhood.⁸¹ Though crises in childhood are not new, it is clear that how the political is constituted in childhood is being questioned:

Children are seen as ‘presocial’, unable to articulate a set of coherent political views (Sears and Valentino, 1997). The social science community has thus treated children’s political participation as a contradiction in terms. A political community has an exclusive adult membership with children unable to provide qualifications for entry. ... these research assumptions connect with broader social forces of convention. For many the very essence of childhood, at least in contemporary western terms, prohibits political participation such that the ‘political child’ is seen as the ‘unchild’, a counter-stereotypical image of

⁷⁸ Holland, *op. cit.*, pp. 13–14.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸⁰ Burman, (1994) *op. cit.*, p. 241.

⁸¹ Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998).

children that does not fit with the way we commonly view childhood (Stainton-Rogers and Stainton-Rogers, 1992: 32–3).⁸²

The contribution children may make to a community is often not recognized as political until it is invited to be so by adults. Competence to vote is one such marker. In Brazil, Croatia and Cuba children may vote from 16. In the UK and across Europe this potential is eclipsed by evidence of children's apparent political apathy. This apathy is perhaps borne of a particular framing of politics and society more generally. As Archard notes, those in power might also be failing to communicate with children.⁸³

Political contribution is thus also an essential aspect of how adulthood is conceived. The last section of this chapter returns to the academic debates on understandings of childhood at the end of the twentieth century, which challenge the contained dimensions of childhood illustrated above.

Agency

Scientific approaches to childhood span barely a hundred years and are supplemented by studies of childhood across nearly all the social sciences. The realization that children are worthy of study as a separate group, has meant therefore a gradual proliferation of approaches across academia with the prefix 'child'. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, for example refers to child-development, child-labor, child abuse, child-psychiatry, child-psychology, and child-welfare without defining parameters of the subject or child.⁸⁴ Each field of enquiry is thought to merit a child sub-category by virtue of the child's developing qualities, physically, emotionally, intellectually and morally, which create different demands in providing for children. More recently, the psycho-social field of development studies has become the arena of contestation for mapping and charting the phenomena of childhood.

It is only in the last two decades however that systematic attempts to study children's socialization, and their own agency have emerged, concomitant with 'the need to reappraise our understanding of childhood as a rehearsal for adult life', and grant children recognition and respect in their right and on their own terms.⁸⁵ Recent constructivist and interpretive approaches taken from the social sciences have led to a reexamination of apparently natural boundaries and dimensions of childhood, the role of social forces in shaping children and the role of children in forming social forces.⁸⁶

⁸² Wyness, M., Harrison, L., and Buchanan, I. (2004), 'Childhood, Politics and Ambiguity: Towards an Agenda for Children's Political Inclusion', *Sociology*, Volume 38(1).

⁸³ Archard (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁸⁴ *Encyclopedia Britannica Micropedia*, Vol. 3, 15th edition (1989).

⁸⁵ Jo Boyden and Deborah Levison, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁸⁶ See for example Alison James and Alan Prout, A. (eds), *op. cit.*; Corsaro, W., *op. cit.*

[t]he new emphasis on context in child development represents a long overdue rapprochement between the individualism of psychology, the social structural concerns of sociology and the cultural descriptions of anthropology.⁸⁷

The construct of the child is now firmly on the agenda of social science research and has recently been the subject of a £3 million project by the Economic and Social Research Council.⁸⁸ It is also newly recognized that concepts of childhood may be culturally created. Across all social science disciplines there is an awareness that children's environment can shape their development, thus posing a unique challenge for researchers to observe children's experience without privileging adult assumptions in that observation process. Most notably the last decade or so of sociology and childhood studies has brought new- found recognition of children's abilities to comprehend political issues and make political decisions perhaps from the ages of nine.⁸⁹

Sociologists increasingly question the validity of literature, which has hitherto treated children as objects rather than subjects. Childhood is inseparable from the adult world that constructs it, which includes the political world. Children too are still being understood as agents in their own identity, rather than mere recipients of adult interpretation. The concept of children observed by adults may not be that which is experienced by the subjects themselves, a phenomenon of duality and misinterpretation which is unique to this cohort, since they cannot represent themselves. As childhood becomes less certain, the popularization of perceived threats to childhood, and reported anomalies of the child's role, particularly in areas of world politics, evidences norms or expectations of childhood. Contemporary media reportage often draws attention to the contamination of childhood by apparently non-childlike experiences such as violence, politics, and sexual activity. These common social norms of acceptable child experiences allow for a great deal of socio-political comment and interference, particularly when such boundaries are overstepped. Holland, argues therefore that the child is a symbol of common humanity.⁹⁰ It is however a Western construct of childhood, as a time of protection whilst adulthood is being attained, against which many 'damaging'/non-Western practices and ideas are measured and criticized. It is an easy step to export blame to developing countries because of their inability to conform to our projected model of childhood.⁹¹ Norman Stone has noted how

⁸⁷ Martin Woodhead, Paul Light and Ronnie Carr, *Open University: Child Development in a Social Context*, Vol. 3, *Growing up in a Changing Society* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. xi.

⁸⁸ ESRC *Children 5-16* Research Programme for the 21st Century 1996–1999.

⁸⁹ See Archard (2004), *op. cit.*; Sharon Stephens, *Children and the Politics of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) and Jim Goddard, Sally McNamee, Adrian James and Allison James (eds) (2005), *The Politics of Childhood: International Perspectives, Contemporary Developments* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan).

⁹⁰ Holland, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

⁹¹ Vanessa Pupavac, 'The Deviant South: The Globalisation of Childhood and the Creation of a New Moral Order', paper presented to British International Studies Association, 1997, p. 28.

the globalization of American Liberal values, particularly a universal protectionist concept of childhood,⁹² carries with it moral or ethical weight which has allowed the United States to wield heavy blows in its discourse with other states.

From this brief tour of childhood it would be difficult to isolate or evaluate the relative importance of the many social, cultural, national, and economic factors which contribute to the construction of the child at any one time. The prominent and recent journal of child studies, *Childhood*,⁹³ defines itself as interdisciplinary in approach and spanning divisions between geographical regions, disciplines, social and cultural contexts. Again, it is arguable if one could produce an equivalent journal of *Adulthood*, which could collate adult experiences and also be defined against childhood. Childhood fluidity and temporality however does mark it out for special attention. A perceived endpoint of childhood may be experienced as no more than a dimension of childhood or adulthood elsewhere. As such it is a powerful construction that can be harnessed readily and subtly. Shifts of meaning in childhood have often occurred within national rather than cultural or social borders as a consequence of national and military mobilization.

Boundaries and dimensions of childhood, are thus concretized at various points in history. In civil wars, where a nation or ethnic group is under threat, particularly in the developing world, childhood has been shown to be contracted, informally and formally, in order that children are freed to perform adult roles earlier. Parents of children in cultures in sub-Saharan Africa have privileged and brought forward puberty rites through fear that their daughters may be violated whilst away from the home. Girls may thus undergo premature puberty rites which take them into the realm of womanhood, respectful marriage or pregnancy, and consequently abandon schooling earlier. In addition their informal education is perceived as beginning at home and formal education is deemed as irrelevant for local needs.⁹⁴ In this area, childhood for girls is thus increasingly delimited by the means taken to avoid the shame of sexual encounters before adult initiation rights. Education is not seen as a right but an indicator of child status. The relative instability of the societal experience of war, particularly in Africa where poverty has deepened and wars with small arms have proliferated, can require an early appropriation of adult roles and behavior by children. The lack of maternal education on childcare, and the inadequate financial provision for health, may also be responsible for a shorter time of acknowledged childhood, compared to the West. A Liberian ten-year-old may be thought of in his community as a child, before and after conflict takes place. Though, for the purposes of participating in a conflict, he may be made forcibly into

⁹² Norman Stone, 'The New Age of Interventionism: the Globalisation of American Liberal Discourse', paper presented to the British International Studies Association, 1997.

⁹³ *Childhood: A Global Journal of Child Research* (London: SAGE, 1995 ff).

⁹⁴ B. Rwezaura, 'The Concept of the Child's Best Interests in the Changing Context of Sub-Saharan Africa,' in Philip Alston (ed.), *The Best Interest of the Child. Reconciling Culture and Human Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, UNICEF, 1994), pp. 102–103.

an adult through a militarized initiation rite and thus think of himself as one.⁹⁵ Child soldiers in Africa may hold the responsibilities of an adult, and think of themselves as taking on adult roles if military obligations come into force at an earlier age than is usual. In 1992 UNICEF reported that in Sudan, 12,500 boys aged between nine and sixteen were kidnapped by rebel fighters to be trained as soldiers. In this case the conscription criterion was two molar teeth.⁹⁶ Acquisition of responsibility may thus indicate a transformation of status. It has long been documented in Northern Ireland and Palestine that war is an initiation rite for boys.⁹⁷ Militarization and masculinity are seen as directly related to maturity.

Chapter 2 continues the uncovering of conceptions about childhood by looking at children's engagement in areas of global politics. Constructs of the child are embodied in their roles, exploitation, and in expectations held of them. Thus dominant constructions of emasculated or unpolitical childhood and the assumed separation of children from the adult political world are brought into question. The multiplicity of understandings of the child and the specificities of socio-economic, cultural, national, gendered and legal dimensions to childhood, outlined in this chapter, also inform these practices.

⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch/Africa, *Easy Prey: Child Soldiers in Liberia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995).

⁹⁶ Molly Moore, John Ward-Anderson, and Chris McGreal, 'Fighting to rescue a lost generation', *The Guardian*, 29 April 1995, p. 15.

⁹⁷ For an overview see Morris Fraser, *Children in Conflict* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

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