

# GLOBAL CHILDHOODS

~ ISSUES AND DEBATES ~

**KATE GREGAN AND DENISE CUTHBERT**



Los Angeles | London | New Delhi  
Singapore | Washington DC

# 1

## KNOWING CHILDREN: THEORY AND METHOD IN THE STUDY OF CHILDHOOD

- Policies and practices aimed at 'protecting the best interests' and 'the rights of the child' are premised on Global Northern ideas of children and childhood.
- The Global Northern understanding of children and childhood is strongly influenced by theories of children as adults in 'development', which permeates a range of fields of intellectual endeavour (e.g. education, law, medicine).
- That approach is increasingly subject to analysis and criticism, based on the theoretical approaches that see children as partaking in a process of socialization (e.g. sociology, anthropology, politics).
- As a result of the intensification of various globalizing forces, those ideas are becoming dominant around the world, although they remain unevenly adopted and openly contested, both by national systems and in local practices.

### INTRODUCTION

Anyone who has seen the globally syndicated genealogical documentary programme *Who Do You Think You Are?* (Wall to Wall and BBC 1, 2004–present) will have some familiarity with just how much childhood can depend on economic, social, political and geographic context. The popularity of tracing family ancestry in the Global North, which has grown exponentially over the past 30 years or so, necessarily begins with returning to the subject's origins and from there traces back through the births (and deaths) of forebears. It is, in essence, a project that can only be achieved by searching through successive lifespans and therefore successive childhoods.

What is a child? On one level the answer to this question may appear blindingly simple.

1. A child is a young human being.
2. A child is in the stage of life known as childhood.
3. A child is *not* an adult.

These intuitive answers seem to be straightforward truth statements. But are the key terms used in our discussion, child and childhood, so easily delineated and defined by seeing them paired with obverse terms, adult and adulthood? What about adolescents and teenagers: are they necessarily children? Are they uniformly *not* adults? When applied to the lived realities of specific people, do these responses even begin to answer our primary question?

A cursory glance at relatively recent history swiftly yields the answer, no. From the 1920s onwards, children and childhood came to be understood and approached in developed, modern societies in ways that were utterly foreign prior to, and for the majority of the world's population at, that time. This was the result of militation for reform in the treatment of children over the nineteenth century that slowly led to the events, proclamations and declarations that culminated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989). The UNCRC, at which we shall look in some detail in Chapter 3 of this book, is the keystone in contemporary constructions of childhood and the demarcation of the child as a specific form of human being (Bhabha, 2006) on a global scale.

In the spirit of genealogical television, we begin our historical contextualization of 'the child' with examples from the British and Australian experience of the lives of three specific children living just prior to the 1920s – Bob Ingham, Nell Duffy and Lance Davey – a time when child reform movements were gaining significant strength internationally but before they were codified by the League of Nations in the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1924). Each of these narratives illustrates an aspect of our point about the historically contingent nature of contemporary views of childhood, at that turning point in the construction of the Global Northern child.

By 1915, aged 15, Robert (Bob) Ingham was sailing the Mediterranean, indentured in the British Merchant Navy as it regularly supplied the Royal Navy during the First World War.<sup>1</sup> Bob had left his home near Stroud in Gloucestershire, where his widowed mother and younger siblings remained. In later life, Bob claimed that he 'jumped ship' in Melbourne around 1921, and went 'bush', and indeed his Merchant Navy record does not give a discharge date. In 1927 he married Agnes (Anne) Duffy, the younger sister of Nell Duffy. Nell Duffy and Lance Davey were the grandparents of Kate Cregan, one of the authors of this book.

As had been the case for several centuries in the UK, sending a son to sea was a recognized way of ensuring that he acquired further skills or practical training, had secure employment that kept him fed and sheltered, and enabled him to contribute to the family income. An apprenticeship in the Merchant Navy was a recognized path to a career at sea in what was, at that time, a thriving industry. As its name implied, the Merchant Navy was unlike the Royal Navy in being based on trade rather than warfare. The Merchant Navy was not as socially prestigious as the Royal Navy, but it was a job with potential prospects.<sup>2</sup> A youth's wages and

rank might reflect his 'junior' status and inexperience, but he would be expected to behave, to all intents and purposes, as an adult (Heywood, 2001).

Ellen (Nell) Duffy was unusual for a girl growing up in a large family in the Australian bush in the second decade of the twentieth century – outback of the mining town Broken Hill, NSW – in still being in school at the age of 14. Nell's sister Edith, two years older, was already married and had had a daughter at the age of 15. Amenities in the family home were few and utilities non-existent: there was no plumbing, electricity, gas, bathroom, laundry or toilet. All the washing was done by hand, outside, and a wood stove was the only means of cooking and heating water. Washing and cooking were labour intensive core tasks and were exclusively viewed as women's work (Roberts, 1985). When in 1916 Nell's mother gave birth to Jack, her tenth and last live birth (of 12 full-term pregnancies, eight of whom survived into adulthood), Nell left school. Summoned from the classroom by her younger brother Carl, Nell was expected to take over her mother's household duties and the baby's care during her mother's month of 'lying in'. By the time Nell was called home from school in 1916, candles, soap, shoes and cloth could be bought in Broken Hill but in addition to cooking and hand-washing, knitting, sewing, milking, and butter- and cheese-making remained common domestic duties. With her elder sister married, her one older brother in work and eight younger siblings to care for, it was both a practical and logical choice for Nell to start work in the home.

Lance Davey was 16 in April 1917 when he took part in an armed robbery in Footscray – a working-class suburb of greater Melbourne – in the company of another young man. Lance had left school (having achieved the 'qualifying certificate') and was employed as an 'electrical improver' in a small city engineering company, Hoey and Bowen's, where he had met his accomplice, Walter Gleeson (*Advertiser*, 8 September 1917: 3). Lance had turned 17 by the time he was apprehended in September 1917, and although his legal counsel argued he should be tried in the Children's Court because he was 'under seventeen' at the time of the offence, Mr Brown of the Criminal Prosecution Service and the presiding magistrate disagreed (*Advertiser*, 1 September 1917: 2). Founded in 1906, the Children's Court of Victoria was a recent, and professedly enlightened, innovation for the specialized handling of legal cases involving those 16 and younger, whether as malefactors or in cases to determine guardianship. However, the fact remained that those who had reached the age of 17 were considered mature and rational enough to be fully culpable for their actions and to be tried, sentenced and imprisoned as adults (Carrington and Pereira, 2009).

Accordingly Lance was charged, tried and found guilty as an adult before the Supreme Court of Victoria and sentenced to three months' imprisonment, suspended on his 'entering into bonds to be of good behaviour for three years' (*Argus*, 19 September 1917: 11). Had the sentence not been suspended, it is highly likely Lance would have been sent to the formidable Pentridge Prison. Gleeson, the owner of the gun, had already served three months in prison for the hold-up (*Weekly News*, 8 September 1917: 2), and subsequently received six months 'with hard labour' for related thefts from Hoey and Bowen (*Advertiser*, 1 September: 3).

The histories of these three young people from Kate Cregan's family are replicated by the experiences of their contemporaries in the first decades of the twentieth century, or at least by those of similar socio-economic backgrounds. In the context of contemporary understandings of childhood – with compulsory schooling, restrictions on employment for people under 17 and legal frameworks in line with the UNCRC that assume not-yet-fully-developed responsibility for those under 18 – these narratives may seem to reveal conditions of childhood and youth that are exploitative and unjust. And yet, none of these young people considered these events, nor the expectations placed on them, nor their treatment to be unusual. None of these three young people could vote until they turned 21<sup>3</sup> and when in paid employment received lower than adult wages: but, in practice, they were functioning as responsible (or irresponsible) citizens long before that age.<sup>4</sup> Further, their experiences were, at the time, relatively enlightened. As we shall see in Chapter 3 in relation to child labour reform in the nineteenth century, the fact that these young people had been in school until 13 or more was a very different state of affairs from their own parents' or grandparents' generations.

In the early twentieth century, most young people in the Global North over the age of 14 were expected to be in full-time work, whether paid or in the home, unless they were of a class that could afford to keep them idle or in schooling long enough to become professionals. As we shall see in Chapter 5, children were on street-corners in the largest cities in the USA, selling newspapers and organizing against their employers when required (Gillespie, 2013). From other US examples we can also see that children in agricultural families were expected to contribute to the family's economic enterprises:

Remembering her own childhood in Massachusetts in the years 1806 to 1823, Elizabeth Buffum Chace recalled: 'In this house, besides the ordinary house-work of those days, various manufactures were carried on: candle making, soap making, butter and cheese making, spinning, weaving, dyeing and of course all the knitting and sewing, the dressmaking and tailoring and probably the shoe making and the millinery of the large household were performed within its limits – and the children, whether native or adopted, began very early to do their share.' (Lovell, 1937: 4, cited in Stern et al., 1975)

From these brief and very specific examples we can begin to map an approach to exploring rather than simply answering our primary question, and to canvassing the meanings of what it is to be a child and what constitutes childhood. Already we can see a vision of children and childhood radically different from dominant contemporary ideas, having perhaps more in common with some of the lived realities of children in developing and under-developed countries that we shall encounter in the case studies in Part Two. The task of Part One, therefore, is to analyse and contextualize those dominant notions as historically and politically informed.

What we demonstrate throughout *Global Childhoods* is that the dominant approaches to children and childhood embedded in UNCRC owe at least as much to the history of knowledge in Western Europe as they do to contemporary, or

historical, issues affecting children. The study and interpretation of efforts to militate for better treatment of children, and the policies formulated around children and childhood are all embedded in more generalized social and political upheavals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As we will show, the understanding and regulation of the embodied lives of children has mutated along with wider epistemological shifts (Elias, 2000; Foucault, 1991; Ariès, 1962) and just which fields of knowledge are considered appropriate in the upward shaping of children has changed over time.

## GLOBAL CHILDHOODS

In Western Europe, religion provided the guiding hand for much of the ethical and moral considerations around children and childhood until at least the end of the seventeenth century. Religious dogma pervaded common cultural expectations of appropriate social and filial relations ('honour thy mother and father both') whether one had access to formal education or not. The offspring of the wealthy and rising classes received these tenets as promulgated in early educational theory and administered in early educational practices (Erasmus, 1530; Castiglione, 1528; Luke, 1989). As Western European nations set about seeding their empires around the globe, they also began the long and ongoing process of globalizing Global Northern culture and knowledge (see, for example, Said, 1978; Schiebinger, 1993) through such processes as education. Children, and understandings of childhood, therefore were amongst the earliest objects of colonization and cultural domination (Fass, 2007). Such processes have been slow and uneven, yet global childhoods shaped in the image of Global Northern childhoods have been in formation for centuries.

As state structures became more secular across Europe from the eighteenth century onwards, many religiously informed attitudes towards the upbringing of children, their proper treatment and their role in society remained in place, but appeared in less spiritual and increasingly 'liberal' guises (Locke, 1690, 1693; Rousseau, 1762; Piaget 1972). Or, rather, the agreed moral and ethical precepts that were once the exclusive domain of faith persisted but became absorbed and naturalized into less spiritual, more scientific practice. As we shall see in more detail in Chapter 2, the notions of children and childhood with which we are familiar in Global Northern cultures today emerged out of these secular inheritors of spiritual assumptions and approaches. The child was presented through a range of relevant expert knowledge systems that over centuries have hardened into realms of professionalism (Foucault 1975, 1988, 1991). In particular, the professional realms of law, medicine and education have been paramount in defining, delimiting and regulating children both at the centre and the periphery of colonial empires. By the late nineteenth century, psychology and sociology also began to play a significant part in the theorization of childhood.

In late- or post-modernity, the theoretical questions posed in these various disciplinary fields (education, law, medicine, psychology, sociology) are accepted as 'legitimate', and are dominant in the formation of knowledge concerning

children and childhood. Around the globe, laws both define and defend the division between adult and child. For example, those defined as children under the law are not necessarily held accountable for their actions to the same degree as those recognized as adults, and are often incarcerated in separate institutions. Medicine has specialties and sub-specialties devoted to the care of children, from gametes onwards. Reproductive medicine, foetal medicine, paediatrics, child and adolescent health and all their sub-specialties are focused on the body of the (legally defined) child. Education is upheld as a universal right of children and conceived of as a primary means of ‘training up’ children into adulthood. Psychology is committed to an understanding of children as the natural precursor to adults in ‘development’: malleable, vulnerable and also in need of specialist treatment according to the stage of development. Sociology looks at both the local and the global socio-political and environmental determinants that affect children and childhoods as objects in themselves. As we shall see in our case studies in Part Two, just how evenly these principles are applied, within and across cultures, is less clear-cut.

Each of these authoritative fields’ construction of ‘the child’ in the Global North has been disseminated within the slow and uneven processes of globalization during the European imperial colonization of Asia, the Americas, Africa and Australasia. This process intensified in and across the twentieth century, as children and childhood increasingly became specific objects of concern on a global scale in the activities of non-government social reformers, in the deliberations of the League of Nations and subsequently at the United Nations. The fact that geopolitical power was centred in the Global North over the course of much of the twentieth century – and that proceedings, policies and conventions in those global bodies were, as a result, infused with Global Northern ‘world views’ – has led to the domination of particular understandings of children and childhood that have often been at odds with the realities of children’s day-to-day lives in local settings in developing and under-developed nations of the Global South.

With these factors in mind, *Global Childhoods* begins by approaching the dominant discourses around children and childhood that stem from the Global North; and then offers case studies of examples where universalizing views have been shown to be flawed or inapplicable. Part One provides a critical analysis of the ways in which childhood studies have arisen in the Global North, unravelling the inter-penetrating constructions and interpretations of children and childhood. We begin, in this chapter, with an exposition on the key theoretical frameworks that suffuse professional discourses on childhood. In Chapter 2, we step back to repeat our initial question, ‘What is a child?’, by looking at the historical construction of the notion of the Global Northern child, and how that has shifted and changed over time. Chapter 3 addresses approaches to children as objects of global and national concern, as evidenced in policy and legal efforts. These arguments are extended into Chapter 4, which concentrates on the formulation and global implementation of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UN 1989).

Part Two then looks at the interplay of these Global Northern assumptions about what it is to be a child in a series of case studies from developed, developing

and under-developed nations. In each instance we can see where the terms of the UNCRC, its Optional Protocols (UN 2000b, 2000c) and related policies are challenged, and local circumstances adapt and contest the central assumptions of a universalizing notion of children and childhood. These case studies begin with the analysis of the places and spaces that are central in discussions of childhood, that is, home, school and work (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 analyses approaches to children in ‘disasters’, taking child soldiers and children orphaned in disasters as examples where aid delivery imports notions of childhood that are problematic. Children as victims of state persecution and forced migration form the basis of discussion in Chapter 7, and the ambiguities in the economics of children, how children are ‘valued’ is the focus of Chapter 8. Finally, the future of children and childhood is discussed in Chapter 9, using examples from debates in reproductive medicine and bioethics.

## THEORIZING CHILDHOOD

Before moving on to contest the universalizability of the taken-for-granted notion of children and childhood, we will begin by unpacking the theoretical underpinnings and the basic assumptions comprehended in the debates and issues affecting children around the globe. As we noted above, the dominant globalizing understanding of children and childhood is a temporal and spatial product, and a focus, of a number of professions: law, medicine and education (over many centuries), and more recently psychology and sociology. Relatedly, the theoretical debates these professions engage in focus on two broad strands of theorization in relation to children and childhood: the child in the process of ‘development’ and the child in the process of ‘socialization’. In the remainder of this chapter we outline key ethical, epistemological and methodological questions in the specialized study of childhood. We do so by highlighting the tensions and contradictions that are inherent in the disjuncture between these two approaches in Euro-centred childhood studies which are most closely identified with two academic disciplines: psychology and sociology.

While the roots of each of these two fields may be seen to reach back much further than their acceptance as scholarly fields (see Chapter 2), they came to prominence as academic disciplines in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Each is concerned to explain why human beings behave or act as they do, and how humans conceive of themselves (form an identity), but from radically different ideological premises. One is concerned with humans primarily as individuals, the other with humans primarily as members of a group.

Psychology, in its concentration on the psyche of the individual, characterizes childhood as a period of development. As such, children are conceived of as a natural category, proto-adults, and what happens during the early life stages is proposed as having ongoing effects into adulthood. The developmental child can be broadly characterized as irrational, untrained, irresponsible and ignorant, but at the same time s/he is deserving of care, protection and guidance (primarily from the family) in coming into being as an adult human being. Sociology, by contrast, looks at children as parts of a larger whole – society. While also characterizing



childhood as a period of growth and maturation of a (social) being in the making – the qualities of which can affect the formation of the adult – the frame of those influences is social rather than individual, and depends on wider input and interactions from the social ‘group’ and the economic, social and political context. In this, a child is a social construction. Developmentalism and socialization, or what might be termed the nature (innate individualism) versus nurture (social determinism) debate on children, starts to appear in its earliest form in the 1670s, as we shall see from some of the examples given in Chapter 2. Here, we are more concerned with their current application.

What developmentalism and socialization have in common is a concern with issues of identity. They are also each focused on children as non-adults. Where the developmental and socialization approaches differ is in the degree to which they interpret a child as: not yet capable of rational decision-making; in need of education (whether formal or informal); less physically skilled and less intellectually able than an adult; primarily concerned with taking part in activities of learning and playing; not to be involved in work until at least 15, or to take on economic (or other ‘adult’) responsibility. Where those differences originate is in the disparate understanding of the child and childhood.

## DEVELOPMENTALISM

The term developmentalism is used to characterize the broad understanding of the individual child’s or youth’s mind (and body) as something that is in the process of being formed: that is, as an individual or identity in the process of ‘becoming’. Further, this theoretical approach proposes that the processes and progress of that formation can be positively or negatively affected. Developmentalism is, today, most closely associated with the work of the French educational psychologist Piaget (1972), although as we will see in the following chapter, it has antecedents in the writing of John Locke (1690) and J.J. Rousseau (1762). It is a theoretical approach that arose out of both psychological and educational theory. The historical dominance of the latter field in the management of children in the Global North has facilitated the depth of the acceptance of its premises in the treatment of children across fields.

Psychology, as based in the Cartesian mind/body split, prioritizes the intellect over the body while also being concerned with the physical effects of mentalities, both in childhood and long after in adulthood. Sigmund Freud’s proposition of the psychosexual phases of infancy and early childhood, which need to be successfully negotiated or resolved to reach fully formed adulthood and avoid the development of pathologies, is a key and culturally weighty example of such thinking. Subsequent psychoanalysts like Jung, Lacan and Kristeva – to name but a few – have their own adaptations of these foundational and formational phases of the child’s psyche.

The development of the child, as a proto-adult, is also marked out on the body. Just as doctors became preoccupied (some, eugenically obsessed) with measuring

aspects of the adult human body in the late-nineteenth century (Schiebinger, 1993), so too did the developing child's body become a site of observation. The measurement of height and weight against age was an innovation that came out of the public health movement (Foucault, 1975), intended to define the ideal stages of growth in a healthy individual. Developmentalism is then not only related to education and psychology, it has direct links to biomedical and/or bio-psychosocial approaches to the human body (and mind). It is a theoretical grounding found in contemporary epidemiology and public health initiatives as promoted by both governments and medical bodies. Age and weight charts, recommendations on the appropriate ages and stages for developing particular capacities (language, gross and fine motor skills) are all part of the developmentalist approach to children, which inevitably centres on managing a child's body. So, within developmentalism there is a strong emphasis on the child as an object of physical observation and surveillance (Foucault, 1975)

In this way of understanding children, the child is a material object, something to be measured, compared, controlled and actively formed. Examples of this approach to children and youth can be found not only in the practices of paediatricians and infant-health workers, but also in campaigns about the negative effects of alcohol on the brains of teenagers; research into young people's incapacity to effectively use rational judgement; their propensity to indulge in risk-taking behaviour; or their capacity to maintain attention in a classroom at particular ages. The developmental child is rarely an agent and far more likely to be seen as a vulnerable innocent in need of protection.

These endeavours have become embedded in educational curricula, with children increasingly monitored for developmentally framed physical parameters and capacities in schools. This is particularly the case in the earliest years of teaching children. The developmental child is involved in education and play – or play as education – and not exposed to pursuits or pressures that belong to the adult world. A developmental child is an individual project in the process of 'becoming' an adult. There is little room for agency in this construction of childhood. The developmental child is by and large a passive object, raw material waiting to be moulded into a later human being, which he or she is on the path to becoming. Developmental assumptions have been embedded in educational and medical constructions of the child over centuries. They are also to be found in legal discourse affecting children.

We will go into much greater depth on the following point in Chapter 4, but it is worth noting here that there are developmental assumptions infused throughout the pre-eminent and globally dominant policy document aimed at the legal protection of children: the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The language of the UNCRC implies a developmental approach, even if not, according to Daiute, taken to the logical extension of enabling greater empowerment of and change for children within the Convention itself (Daiute, 2008). For example, the phrase 'evolving capacities of the child' implies a process of maturation which allows the various bodies that implement the UNCRC at a national level to confirm children's rights as 'embedded in nations' rights'. However, those in power do not necessarily represent everyone.

Whether ‘evil’, ‘innocent’, ‘immanent’, ‘naturally developing’ or ‘unconscious’ (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998), the developmental child is deep-rooted in Global Northern culture and pervasive as a model applied through educational, psychological, medical and legal discourse. In turn, the effects of that dominance are felt throughout the Global South in its permeation of various waves of colonialism, through UN charters, and through international aid. But the developmental model of the child is also contested. Social and political theories of children and childhood stand in opposition to and critically analyse the developmental construction of the child.

## SOCIALIZATION

Socialization is a term that comprehends a broad and influential understanding of the creation of society as a whole. It is a basic element in the formation of the ‘self’ or of identity, and goes back to the work of early sociologists such as James (1890), Cooley (1902) and G.H. Mead (1934). Cooley’s notion of the looking-glass self and Mead’s propositions around self-awareness and self-image each grounded early notions of identity in sociology. Socialization is the process by which we come to form our understanding of ourselves, our identity, through our interactions with others. In that process individuals have agency. We identify with and respond to the approval or disapproval of the group. While, in its earliest expressions, this theorization of identity took into account the formation of selfhood within childhood, it was essentially more concerned with the end-product: the adult. So, like psychology and education, early socialization theory was more concerned with the child as an agent in the process of ‘becoming’.

More recently, socialization has been used as an approach to the conceptualization of children, which comes out of sociological and liberal political theory. While, in its earliest form, socialization focused on children not as important social agents in and of themselves, but rather as a stage or stages in the formation of the ‘real’ social agent, the emphasis began to change in the 1980s. It would be fair to say that Leena Alanen was one of the earliest sociologists, and certainly now one of the best known, to promote programmatically ‘Rethinking childhood’ (1988) and the socialization of children within sociology and other social sciences. Shortly after the publication of her ground-breaking article, she co-founded the journal *Childhood*, and remains a central figure in the field. Her approach concentrates on the child’s or youth’s ability to control and to act consciously: to be social actors or agents in their own right. The child’s ability to self-determine is uppermost from this point of view.

Not unlike Luther’s provocation for the Reformation of Catholicism, James and Prout’s (1990) allied agenda took the shape of a set of six theses for a revolution in approaches to children and childhood. The most pertinent of these propositions for our purposes are the first four: that childhood is a social construction; that it is a variable of social analysis; that children’s social relationships and culture are ‘worthy of study in their own right’; and that children are and must be seen as active (not passive) subjects (James and Prout, 1990: 8). This is no longer a ‘becoming’ child; this

is a 'being' child. Subsequent strands of debate in this field, following on debates on adult subjectivity (Lee 2001, cited in Hallden, 2005), have included discussions of the child as both 'being and becoming' (Hallden, 2005). Rather than just concentrating on a child as either in a state of 'becoming' a social agent (Qvortrup et al., 1994) or in a state of 'being' 'worthy of study' in his or her own right (James and Prout, 1990), children (and adults) are each in a state of 'being and becoming'. That is, children have an experiential reality 'in the moment' of childhood that is a valid site of agency (and object of study) and they are also aware of and can articulate their experience as a state of progression to a future self.

Examples of agency or self-determination in children (in a developed country) might include being able to make representations for themselves in the public sphere (legal actions, medical procedures, political campaigns, youth parliaments, etc.) or to enjoy balancing education and play (which includes all forms of extra-curricular pursuits). In developing or under-developed countries, that agentic self-determination may involve a child's need to find a balance between being responsible for contributing to the family unit by undertaking paid labour and the pursuit of an education (see Chapter 8). In countries that are experiencing social and political unrest, this may even extend to children taking part in war: that is, putting their bodies on the line in theatres of armed conflict (Chapter 6).

We can look to the treatment of children for life-threatening or terminal illnesses for a confronting example of child agency from the Global North. A news story, ostensibly about the opening of a new waiting room in a cancer clinic's children's ward, was broadcast on a Melbourne television station under the heading, 'Normality for Cancer Patients'.<sup>5</sup> At base, however, the report concerned an aspect of childhood that we prefer not to talk about in the Global North, because it is no longer a familiar or quotidian experience. (In under-developed countries with high infant mortality rates, such as Afghanistan and Papua New Guinea, people are more likely to witness personally that children may, and do, die.) This particular piece was reported as a 'good news' story, because donations had made possible the inclusion of the latest video-games and other technological diversions for those waiting, some for chemotherapy, in a brightly coloured and cheerful space.

Doctors have for some time been educated to consider their patients' point of view and build a consultative doctor-patient relationship (rather than a paternalistic one). However, in nearly all instances people under the age of 16 have to rely on parental consent when they are in need of medical treatment. The sense of normality in the opening of the waiting room in this cancer ward equated to suppressing and ignoring the reality of the situation of these children by retreating into a fantasy world of 'children as innocents at play'. The assumption implicit in the attempt to normalize this life-threatening situation is that children are not capable of processing such serious information as their impending death.

One research study of terminally ill children in hospital (Bluebond-Langer, 1978 cited in Ryan, 2008: 572-4) makes clear how the reactions of adults and professionals around the children ignored or suppressed their agency in the dying process. In consultations and in daily treatments, the (uncomfortable) adult professionals preferred instead to divert conversation away from the eventuality and practicalities of dying. While the doctors were approaching their patients from a developmental

perspective, the children were in fact perfectly aware of their situation and were capable of displaying sophisticated agency. Ryan (2008: 573) even gives an example: a child rejected the physician's attempt to cajole him with a question about what he would be 'when he grew up', 'with the heated response, "I'm not going to be anything"'. Ryan notes, however, that the majority 'accommodated a "mutual pretense"'. In this particular example we see the practical tension between a professional with embedded developmental assumptions and the reality of the child (under the age of 12) as a social agent capable of understanding his or her own state of 'being and becoming'.

As the field of 'childhood studies' has grown since Alanen, James, Jenks, Prout, Qvortrup and others shifted the discourse on childhood from 'becoming', to 'being', and to 'being *and* becoming', other strands of social theory have been highly influential in approaches to the study of children and childhood. One in particular is Bourdieu's concept of habitus, because habitus and hexis (embodiment) are formed through what Hallden calls 'being and becoming'. The applicability of habitus in the conceptualization of childhood will become more obvious when we turn to our case studies, particularly in the discussion of the places of childhood (Chapter 5). What the notion of habitus may offer us for the moment is a way to conceptualize and accommodate more interplay between developmentalism and socialization, rather than a stark and uncompromising binary opposition.

Since the time that the work of Alanen and other sociologists of childhood first began to appear (see Wyness, 2006), similar endeavours have been underway in anthropology, which has brought to the discussion a wide body of evidence of the cultural specificity of most of the Global Northern UNCRC ideas of childhood. Lancy (2008) and Montgomery (2009) are but two of an increasing number of anthropologists questioning the effects of the normalization of a culturally and historically contingent notion of childhood on societies with different understandings, as we will see in Part 2 of *Global Childhoods*.

## GLOBAL CHILDHOODS

We have canvassed examples from law, medicine, education, psychology and sociology that contain aspects of both developmental and socialization approaches to children and childhood. These meta-theoretical debates are played out in the research literature on children in each of these professional fields, to a greater or lesser extent. This is at least in part because the histories of these disciplines are interpenetrating.

Psychology (including educational psychology) and sociology were groundbreaking and influential academic disciplines that were gaining credibility in the last years of the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century. As such, they played into the legal frameworks regarding children that were formulated after the First World War, particularly the deliberations of the League of Nations. Almost contemporaneously, Norbert Elias,<sup>6</sup> who was to become an extremely influential sociologist from the middle of the twentieth century, was working on his (Western

European) social history of civilization in the medieval period through to the twentieth century, which drew heavily on theories of the education of children and the regulation of their embodied actions. This work had a second spring after the Second World War, at which point Ariès and the *Annales* School started to look at history in a different way, including the history of the family. In these movements, children were predominantly seen as subordinate; they still are. But these academic areas had the authority of delimitation to frame newer ways of looking at the categories of 'child' and 'childhood'. In doing so, childhood gained gradations and stages.

On the developmentalism continuum teenagers and youths are objects of control, but they are also accorded capacities younger children such as infants and pre-adolescents are not. Legally, youths are expected to have the rational capacities to avoid breaking the law and at the same time they are 'minors' and not accorded full standing under the law. Youths are therefore subject to higher penalties for breaking the law but treated more leniently as not yet capable of fully responsible decision-making. With respect to bodies, this has practical applications in the ways youth are treated by legal bodies or peace-keepers when they have been participants in armed conflicts. Such youths are also the subject of social anxiety and moral panics, as members of gangs or as child soldiers (see Chapter 6). On the other hand, from the point of view of socialization, 'being' youths may also be seen as capable of self-determination. They may have the right to 'choice' in the management of their own bodies (medically), in how they use their bodies (sexually) and in where they place their bodies (in protests). The bodies of youths are causes of concern for their likelihood to put themselves at risk of physical harm (train-surfing, joy-riding, extreme sports). The bodies of youths are also the key focus of concern over eating disorders, which is an extension of the concerns over healthy development.

This counter-posing of the developmental and socialized notions of children and childhood also brings into question the universal applicability of documents such as the UNCRC. In a long, dense and excellent summary of the formation and subsequent criticisms of the UNCRC, Harris-Short (2001) acknowledges and demonstrates the culturally informed (Global Northern) bases of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNUDHR), the precursor to and intimately allied with the UNCRC. The main arguments that have been used to justify its universality have been both ethnocentric and morally imperialistic, or at least still based in notions of rights inherent in an individual 'self' (which is not the basis of all states/nations' conceptions of citizens).

Rights-based discourse on children, as found in the UNCRC, and welfare-focused scholarship and policy on children are consistently at odds in their framing of children as rights-bearing individuals on the one hand, and 'objects of concern' in need of special care and protection. Who knows best about the conditions of children and childhood? Can children be 'objects of concern' (to researchers, policy-makers, educators, etc.) and subjects in their own right? What are the contradictions between conceptions of children as rights-bearing individuals, and as immanent subjects in need of protection? Is it possible – or even desirable – to produce knowledge about children with their involvement as

subjects with agency? What does child-centred methodology look like? And how can knowledge about children be produced with their involvement as agents and subjects, and not merely as 'objects of concern'?

This book is intended to give a broad overview of how contemporary approaches to childhood were formed by framing answers to these questions. We aim to show how the dominant ideas that are embedded in everyday practices and policies towards children, and the prevailing disciplinary methods applied in those policies and practices, are not easily universalized to all children, across time, place and culture. In her study of inter-country adoption in the Americas, historian Karen Dubinsky remarks that childhood is an invention of the West (Dubinsky, 2010: 16). We outline a narrative which shows that, concomitant with the invention of a particular idea of childhood in Western Europe (Chapter 2), nineteenth-century European imperialist and twentieth-century economic development agendas imposed this invention on the rest of the world (Chapters 3 and 4). That imposition commenced in the early-modern period (1500–1800), through colonizing activity, particularly missionary activity in imperial territories in the Americas, Asia, Africa and Australasia and continued in the aid and development initiatives of the twentieth century.

In these endeavours the children of the world – or those who could be reached – were quite systematically 'remade' as Christians, taught European languages, put into European clothes, educated to European norms and standards, told that their cultures and practices were primitive and that their future lay in transforming themselves through 'civilization' and modernization. To this end, many children were forcibly removed from their families and communities for (what they were told was) their betterment and advancement. The efforts of these early missionaries pre-dated the particular conception of childhood that emerged slowly and unevenly from the end of the eighteenth century and the rise of industrialization, and which obtains in policy documents today.

While this missionary work continued into the twentieth century, this century of World Wars (both 'hot' and Cold) elevated the project of consolidating childhood to a secular and civil mission of governments, inter-governmental bodies, and non-government organizations (some of which had origins in missionary enterprises). While shifting from a largely religious to a secular framework, the childhood project remained firmly rooted in Global Northern conceptions of childhood – which have also mutated over the course of the century.

The twentieth century saw an intensification of the management of childhood as an increasingly professionalized, medicalized, and psychologized domain. Parents and families were no longer simply entrusted with the raising of children. Raising children became a state-monitored and regulated activity with regimes related to education, health and other activities mandated by law, and with associated monitoring for compliance. As the century progressed, national governments themselves became subject, through their ratification of international conventions, to monitoring by global bodies with respect to their treatment of children. Dealing with children became the preserve of the expert; one which has been increasingly observed and even policed in the contemporary period. For example, police checks – or working with children checks – are now required in many

Global Northern jurisdictions in order to teach, coach children's football teams, or participate in other activities involving children.

As the twentieth century progressed, the scope of the global childhood project also expanded and transformed. First the League of Nations, then the United Nations, accompanied by a plethora of national and transnational child-focused bodies too numerous to list, proliferated to form a more or less coherent global children's movement which drove the childhood agenda across the world. The aims of this movement shifted and developed from the largely religious objective of salvation to the largely economic aspirations centred on development. By the middle of the twentieth century it had moved on again, to the multiple, integrated objectives encapsulated in the rights-based UNCRC of 1989. Notably, the UNCRC added civic and political dimensions to the understanding of children and childhood. The capacity to endorse and then enact this version of childhood became a key marker of modern nationhood in the 1990s, notwithstanding deep and unresolved tensions within the UNCRC itself, with respect to its simultaneous and potentially contradictory claims to universalism and to respect for cultural and other diversity in the lives of children.

As any book on childhood must recognize, the global child – as most fully imagined and articulated in the 1989 UNCRC – is an invention of the Global North in line with the invention of childhood itself. The global child as envisaged in the UNCRC, and a great deal of developmental activity associated with the so-called Global Children's Movement, is directed to advancing the interests and assuring the rights of a normative version of the child. While making some concessions to differences between children, the Convention implicitly assumes throughout and explicitly states in the preamble, that the end goal of childhood is the formation of an adult citizen competent and capable of living individually and contributing productively to a Western-style liberal democracy.

One of the achievements of the twentieth century's focus on childhood, as documented in this book, is to formulate the category of childhood as a privileged, special period of development and in doing so to establish this category as a global norm. The success of this endeavour has brought mixed blessings to the children of the world. While many now enjoy material conditions which they otherwise would not, many others do not. Through our exploration of the history and governance of children and childhood, fleshed out by case studies of children's lived realities and an analysis of the international policies that affect them, we aim to bring into sharper relief the critical issues and debates that are entailed in the construction of *Global Childhoods*.

## NOTES

- 1 Parts of this narrative are based on oral testimony and, as with any oral history, there may be aspects where memory has reshaped details, but the key points are supported by archival records.
- 2 See Jane Austen's depictions of both of adults and young boys sent to sea, based on her own brothers' careers in the Royal Navy, on officers being drawn from the 'gentlemanly' and 'noble' classes.



- 3 Over the first decade of the twentieth century Australian women were enfranchised. The Federal Whitlam Labor government lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 in 1973, so in fact even young men who at 19 or 20 became eligible to be drafted into the Vietnam War between 1964 and 1972, could not vote.
- 4 Shamefully, Indigenous Australians were treated in the same manner no matter what their age, able to serve in wars but unable uniformly to vote in Federal elections until 1962 (AEC, 2006) and for many their wages were withheld and controlled (until 1972), or inequitable and lower, in some cases until 1986 (Kidd, 2006).
- 5 'Normality for cancer patients: The Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre has a funky new waiting room', Seven Nightly News (Channel Seven, Melbourne, Friday, 16 April 2010. <http://search.informit.com.au.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=TEV20101504268;res=TVNEWS>).
- 6 Elias had been studying to be a doctor before becoming an ambulance-man in the First World War but decided to pursue a doctorate in sociology after the end of the war.

### Further reading

Alanen, L. (1988) 'Rethinking childhood', *Acta Sociologica*, 31 (1): 53–67.

Fass, P. (2007) *Children of a New World: Essays in Society, Culture and the World*. New York: New York University Press.

James, A., Jenks, C. and Prout, A. (1998) *Theorizing Childhood*. Cambridge: Polity.

Lancy, D.F. (2008) *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattels, Changelings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Montgomery, H. (2009) *An Introduction to Childhood: Anthropological Perspectives on Children's Lives*. Chichester: Wiley.

Qvortrup, J., Bardy, M., Sgritta, G. and Wintersberger, H. (eds) (1994) *Childhood Matters: Social Theory, Practice and Politics*. Aldershot: Avebury Press.

Uprichard, E. (2008) 'Children as "being and becomings": Children, childhood and temporality', *Children & Society*, 22: 303–13.

Wyness, M. (2006) *Childhood and Society: An Introduction to the Sociology of Childhood*. New York: Palgrave.