

## *The Abnormal Distribution of Development: policies for Southern women and children*

ERICA BURMAN, *Manchester Metropolitan University, UK*

**ABSTRACT** *This paper offers a feminist critique of the relationships between gender and development by exploring the intersections between three sets of debates: firstly, the relations between interventions for women and for children through the anomalous position accorded to 'the girl child' in aid and development policies; secondly, the relations between psychological and economic models of development; and thirdly, the gendered and geographical allocation of attributes and opportunities. Drawing on analyses of the 'psychological complex' I suggest that the cultural resources that inform developmental psychological models are highly cultural and class specific (white, middle class, of the northern hemisphere), giving rise to a globalisation of development that is reinscribed within international aid and development policies. In homogenising difference to its norms, this globalisation paradoxically reproduces the north-south opposition as an expression of cultural and political imperialism. While northern children 'develop', dominant discourses of children of the South are preoccupied with 'survival'. By such means the cultural hegemony of a unitary psychology remains intact. This paper discusses the 'abnormal distribution' of development to draw attention to the ways cultural and gender inequalities flow from the norms and generalised descriptions central to the current practice of developmental psychology and to urge that this is an important site of intervention for feminists addressing gender and development issues.*

In this paper I want to pose a number of questions about the discourses of development that developmental psychology participates in within international aid and development programmes. My purpose in drawing attention to these issues in this journal is to highlight how the intersections between gender and development that feminists have identified in relation to economic models of development are also reproduced within, and bolstered by, psychological models. I will be tracing through the consequences of repressing the cultural resources that inform developmental psychological models in relation to their function within policies and programmes for children. This is of importance in relation to three areas of feminist debate and activity: firstly, the consequences for women of measures that claim to champion the interests of children; secondly, the conceptualisation of the relations between women's and children's rights; and thirdly, the anomalous suppression of gender and corresponding privileging of masculinity in developmental psychological models, which, when applied to children of the South [1], can be seen to reverse into its 'other' with the policy focus on 'the girl

child'. Thus I will be arguing that children's issues are gender issues in a variety of ways, and that feminists and other critics of models of economic development also need to attend to the cultural assumptions that inform psychological models of gender, childhood, and development.

By means of this focus on developmental psychology I will argue that while economic and psychological models purport to be universal, the geographical distribution of *psychological* development maps on to *economic* inequalities between the northern and southern hemispheres as an extension of the models' suppression of gender and cultural differences within the North. However, this does not mean that developmental psychology only reflects these differences; in some respects it may actively contribute to them. I will be drawing in particular on United Nations (UN) documentation on women and children to urge that supporting the development of children in so-called developing countries poses a number of theoretical and political challenges, and to demand that we reflect on some of the initial premises and discourses of 'development'. The paper concludes with an evaluation of rights rhetoric and legislation.

At the outset I should make clear that while discourse analysis and post-structuralist ideas within psychology and social theory generally have fuelled post-colonial critiques, these also are based on Northern models (Spivak, 1988; Harasym, 1990). Moreover, I am not suggesting that an adequate response to globalisation is the assertion of particularity or revaluation of locality. I shall be arguing that the task for critical theorists of development—psychological and otherwise—is to develop analyses that attend to cultural particularity without sliding into either cultural hierarchies or romanticised orientalism and its cognates, whilst also warding off the relativism incipient within the discursive celebrations of difference (where difference stands in for oppression).

## All Our Children? [2]

The recent rallying cry in the UK of 'All Our Children' is persuasive and emotive. It implies that all children share the same attributes and the same needs. As mobilised in children's rights literature and legislation, there is an appeal to universal aspects of the condition of childhood, which, in much of the world, are certainly in need of promotion and protection. Yet the significations set in play by the image of the child are multiple and contradictory. Children are typically abstracted from culture and nationality to connote such qualities as innocence, and the quintessential goodness of humankind untainted by the cruel, harsh contaminating world. Thus the child often functions to reproach the rest of the adult world for its misdemeanours, with imagery of children connoting both the future and a moral voice of the 'good self', as on a Paris tourist postcard where the image of a blond, blue-eyed child carries the caption, '*Notre planète est unique il faut la protéger*'. However, it should be noted that the opposition set up between 'innocence' and 'experience' is itself a product of a specific Western philosophical legacy, and one which works to pathologise those (especially Southern) children who cannot afford to be 'innocent' in their struggle for survival; (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1992; Burman, 1994a; 1994b). The capacity for children to represent a generalised future has been mobilised within anti-nuclear campaigns and the peace movement (Williamson, 1986). But if children are 'our' future, then it is interesting to see that the images of children who lay claim to the world are white European children.

The universalisation of Northern childhood thus mirrors the Northern colonial domination of the South. Where political-territorial affiliations are connected with images of children, these are treated as symmetrical relationships rather than relations of

inequality, as in the (now outdated) image of Soviet-US relations from Benetton where identical twin girls sport different flags. Where cultural differences (coded through colour differences) appear, these have been linked with Christian symbolism associated with colour (elaborated again by Benetton in a now controversial image of the white-child-angel, black child-devil). In these contexts we might also note that where black and white (children) are portrayed together, the white figure adopts a protective (as in the cover to the BBC booklet *All Our Children*, where the white girl has her arm around the black boy) and sometimes enveloping (another Benetton image shows a black baby surrounded by white teddies) stance towards the black, which, through the proverbial connection between children and animals, extends beyond the human to the portrayal of animals. As Pat Holland (1992) has noted, the representation of lone black children in aid appeals works frequently to pathologise their families and cultures, positioning these as failing to fulfil their duties. Colonial legacies blend into humanitarian concern, where in order to qualify for 'help', parents are either invisible or infantilised as incapable.

Just as the representation of childhood has been sentimentalised and abstracted from history and culture in ways that suppress cultural and gender inequalities, so developmental psychology has provided culturally based and culturally biased models that are taken as universally applicable, but are distributed across geographical and historical space in highly significant ways. Within contemporary aid and development literature, the representation of development is polarised so that developmental issues for children of the North concern early education and environmental enrichment, while in the South they focus on mere survival. Childhood has been fractured so that only children of the North develop, while children of the South are primarily portrayed as those whose childhoods have been stolen (cf. Vittachi, 1989). While the discourse of freeing children of the South concerns abolishing child slavery and bonded labour, the package holiday company Airtours advertises 'Free children' to refer to one child travelling free on a package holiday when accompanied by two adults and a child (note the nuclear family ideology here).

It is significant that instead of this distribution making us examine the contents of what we understand by childhood, as a reflection of contemporary Northern and middle-class practices, the popular discourses of 'child-saving' measure the extent to which Southern children are deprived of the childhood to which they are entitled. And so these discourses reinstate Northern models. In part this is driven by the constraints of fund-raising and consciousness-raising in the North, where campaigns are premised on the assumption that such contrasts will be the most effective in eliciting a response, as in the 1992/93 Action Aid advertisements: 'Do you really need 50p more than she does?' and '£15 will intoxicate you for the night or inoculate her for life' (see Burman, 1994b). In terms of child (under) nutrition there are relatively clear measures such as the weight to height ratio, or middle arm circumference (although even these are not unambiguous, since they could arise from illness, particularly diarrhoeal infections, rather than absence of food). But criteria for child *development*, like the notion of childhood itself, are less easy to determine.

In terms of the role of psychology in child welfare promotion, from the late 1980s onwards international bodies such as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) have come to recognise that psychological development can promote rather than simply succeed child survival (McGuire & Austin, 1987; Myers, 1992). But, despite a rhetoric of cultural sensitivity and specificity, the developmental psychology that is entering UN policies still retains a commitment to prescriptions for child care and development that are assumed to transcend cultural variation. It thereby

globalises what are, in fact, middle-class, Northern models (Boyden, 1990; Burman, 1993, 1994c).

### Are Children's Issues also Gender Issues?

Questions of gender intersect with those of culture in the globalisation of developmental psychology. While the girl signifies the charm, helplessness and vulnerability of Northern notions of childhood, the playful, active, discovering child of cognitive developmental models reflects culturally masculine qualities, reflected in the toy advertisements' subscription to imagery of scientists, construction workers and astronauts (Burman, 1995). If the state of childhood is feminised (note the visibility of girl-gendered children in the aid appeals above), the developmental trajectory from childhood to maturity within models of cognitive (e.g. Piagetian) and emotional (e.g. Bowlbyan) development describes a transition from attachment to detachment, from dependence to autonomy, that is shot through with gendered assumptions (Broughton, 1988; Walkerdine, 1988).

Yet despite this implicit focus on gender models of the developing child are portrayed as gender- as well as culture-free. Like culture, gender is a floating variable that somehow, somewhere along the purportedly unitary developmental pathway, becomes attached to 'the child'. Notwithstanding the generality of the psychological models and their reflection within international legislation, the gender specificity of the supposedly gender-neutral 'child' of international aid and development policies is reflected in the qualification of 'the girl child'. The need to address the situation of girls as a particular class within the group of children, arises from documentation of how the key issues of survival, access to health care and access to education dramatically affect girls more than boys. Significantly in Nigel Cantwell's (1992) 'Introduction' to the '*Travaux Préparatoires*' [Working Documents] of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, he identifies as one of its key achievements the inclusion within Article 24 (on access to health and education) of the states' requirements to 'work towards the abolition of traditional practices such as female circumcision and preferential treatment of male children'.

In this sense, and in contrast with their representation within psychological models (where gender is suppressed), children's issues are very much gender issues. In addition to the role of reproductive technologies in pre-selecting boy children and aborting girl baby foetuses, which is dramatically affecting the sex ratio in some areas of the world (Patel, 1989; Sen, 1990), mortality rates for girls are higher than those of boys (*First Call for Children*, 1992, p. 4), and of the 25% of primary school children in the South not enrolled in schools, two-thirds are girls (Colcough with Lewin, 1993). Moreover, a study in India documents how children, especially girls, and women get less to eat (e.g. Batliwale, 1984), while all over the world the overwhelming majority of children who are sexually abused or involved in prostitution are girls (Ennew, 1986) (although this is not to dismiss the sexual exploitation of boys). In terms of debates about child labour, one of the various factors put forward to account for the underenrolment of girls in school is that girls work twice as many hours as boys, and their domestic responsibilities are continuous rather than time-limited. They often take on adult responsibilities before the age of 10 in order to relieve their mothers for paid work (UNICEF, 1992, p. 18). (Other reasons reported for underenrolment are poverty, low status of women, concerns about girls' moral safety, early marriage or pregnancy, inappropriate school facilities, limited job opportunities and uncertain economic returns [UNICEF, 1992, p. 17].) Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP) have exacerbated the costs of food, education and health care

provision, and the pressures on girls and women have correspondingly increased (Patel, 1992). It is in response to such data that the decade from 1991 has been declared the Decade of the Girl Child, and that UNICEF has produced specific policy documents for girls (e.g. UNICEF, 1992). A strategy UNICEF advocates to counter the low status of girls and women is to attempt to revalue women's and girls' contribution to production. In line with the quantification of development (see below) this is cast in rather disturbingly economic terms, as in, for example, the document 'The Girl Child: an investment in the future' produced by UNICEF to promote national programmes of action.

### Are Women's Issues also Development Issues?

By the same token, it could be argued that women's issues are very much development issues. That is, that the issues of poverty, health and education, of reducing exploitation, and promoting equality and opportunity that are central to development policies, are particularly associated with women's positions. Indeed the emergence of the notion of the 'feminisation of poverty' in discussions of welfare and the labour market reflects an acknowledgement that the burden of poverty falls disproportionately on women. However, current moves towards 'integrating women in development' not only fail to recognise that women have always been central to development, but have also been criticised as functioning to colonise the informal sector (now that the formal sector is either exhausted or saturated) and thereby to extend the exploitation of women. As Peggy Antrobus argues:

...Far from not taking women into account these policies are actually grounded in a set of assumptions—a gender ideology—that assigns certain roles and characteristics to women. Indeed, it is clear to me that both components of structural adjustment policies—those aimed at *reducing consumption* (the austerity measures reflected in government expenditures in social services) as well as those aimed at *increasing export-oriented production* (the emphasis on the promotion of Export Processing Zones) are dependent on assumptions about the roles into which most women have been socialised. (Antrobus, 1989, p. 3, emphasis in original)

Similarly Vibhuti Patel (1992) considers the slogan of 'Integrating Women in Development' to be a euphemism for the exploitation of Southern women who are used as a cheap, flexible, 'docile and nimble-fingered' work-force for multinational companies seeking to reduce manufacturing costs by basing production in Southern countries and promoting home-working and the casualisation of labour.

By this analysis, the process of development has not favoured women. Indeed the drive towards income-generating activities has undermined women's subsistence activities, and therefore worked to the detriment of both women's and children's welfare. The equation of income generation with making money has served the interests of international capital by orienting women's work towards export-oriented production, but eroded their resources. The process of internationally governed development has therefore impoverished women more and deprived them of the means to withstand the retractions of services caused by the compulsory implementation of SAP.

## Are Women's Issues also Children's Issues?

The question arises, then, of whether women's issues in development are children's issues. And there are certainly common sets of concerns around health, education and labour, given the increasing numbers of female-headed households and the necessary continuity between the positions of girls and women (since girls become women). Hence the 1992 UNICEF policy review calls for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to be implemented in conjunction with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). However, as currently formulated within current policies and practices, there are some tensions between the interests of women and those of children. In their evaluation of Save the Children funded projects, Gill Peace & David Hulme (1993) challenge the assumption underlying the promotion of income generating schemes which states that overall increases in household income will necessarily 'trickle down' to ameliorate the condition of children—although where the household is female-headed this assumption is more likely to be merited. They also call for the need to explore the relationship of participation in income-generating activity with child education, since the increased value of child labour within a small enterprise, rather than poverty alone, could account for children missing school. Similarly, greater child care responsibilities may fall on girls to permit their mothers to participate in the scheme.

Correlatively, interventions for children mean greater responsibilities for women. The GOBIFFF formula that currently dominates child survival and development policies (Growth monitoring, Oral rehydration to treat diarrhoea—a major cause of infant and child deaths, Breast-feeding, Immunisation, Feeding supplements, Female education, and Family spacing) places increased demands on women: to take their children to be immunised, to monitor their growth, to be available to breast-feed, and so on. While the documentation sometimes discusses 'parents' and 'child care activities', this work usually, and usually correctly, is assumed to be done by women.

One area where psychological theories exacerbate the potential for women's oppression lies in the export of Northern prescriptions for child stimulation and development. At the moment when critiques of the role of developmental psychology as regulating women as mothers are beginning to be heard in the North (Urwin, 1985; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989; Marshall, 1991), we have those models being promulgated as prescriptions for child survival and development in the South. Parent education, paraprofessional home-visiting, injunctions to exploit any antenatal or infant health check to 'integrate' development with health advice (e.g. Myers, 1992), all widen the scope for the evaluation and pathologising of poor, uneducated women. These are women who fail to conform to the latest brand of developmental psychological theory that has found its way in fairly unadulterated form into the texts and practices of health care professionals of the South. This is not to say that some of it might not be useful, but rather that despite the rhetoric of cultural specificity and sensitivity, many of the starting assumptions remain unexamined for their specificity of context of formulation, that is in the North (see Burman, 1993; Woodhead, 1990). If the discourses of sensitive mothering and autonomous children are rooted in the production of the self-regulating, self-governing citizen of the North (Walkerdine, 1984; Rose, 1985; 1990), then their globalisation within aid and development policies adds cultural stigmatisation to their existing class and gender chauvinisms. As Sathyamala *et al.* (1986), in their handbook for rural health workers in India point out, the requirement to provide a 'stimulating environment' is in danger of succeeding the attribution of lesser intelligence as a current means of pathologising poor, Southern women:

Here understanding of what is meant by a 'stimulating environment' should be questioned... Since most researchers come from economic and cultural backgrounds which are totally different from those of the poor people, their studies tend to perceive and measure poor people from their own standards. This perhaps could also explain the bias that the environment of poor people is non-stimulating. (Sathyamala *et al.*, p. 142)

Teaching mothers to play with their children may be of less importance than providing mothers with the child care and local schools to afford them the time necessary to raise the financial status of the family. While these are not mutually exclusive interventions, all too often in these days of SAP the extra burden for both economic and psychological development falls on mothers and families rather than on national or international aid and development organisations.

### Women as Mothers

Two other components of the GOBIFFF formula for the promotion of child survival call for scrutiny in terms of their implications for women's welfare and rights: family spacing and female education.

Added to the regulation of women's adequacy as mothers is the extension of control over their bodies in the name of children's health. The rationale for and focus of health services for women in Southern countries is often principally oriented around their health needs as mothers. Yet maternal mortality is not the major cause of death for women in the South. As Sathyamala *et al.* (1986) comment on the Indian context:

While it is true that the child's health is dependent upon the mother, this is no justification for concentrating on a woman's health only during motherhood... It therefore seems as if the medical profession is only interested in supervising women so they can perform their reproductive functions properly. (Sathyamala *et al.*, 1986, p. 150)

The association between family size and child survival is used to justify the implementation of draconian population control policies, which serve purposes other than health promotion. Population control has become integral to aid and development programmes, so that international loans are linked to family planning programmes (Duden, 1992). Patel (1992) notes that the only sector of funding for women which increased in the 1991-92 Indian budget was 'population control'. Although presented as a basic human right that empowers women, in practice this is far from the case. Poor women seeking employment in poverty alleviation schemes are forced to accept dangerous birth control drugs and devices. This also further colludes in the pathologising of the South by the North, in rendering Southern countries as responsible for 'overpopulation'. The issue is not overpopulation but distribution of resources:

Massive sums have been provided by the USAID to push controversial contraceptives like Norplant/Net-O-En which are banned in most of the Western countries. Advocacy for 'population control' has been a crucial concern of NEP-SAP. Poor women are also blamed for causing environmental crisis by breeding like 'cats' and 'rats'. It is time to ask our policy makers, to what extent top-down population control programmes that violate basic human rights of Indian women be justified? Secondly, by victimising the victims of the patriarchal class society aren't we ignoring the major causes of environmental crisis such as industrial toxic wastes, chemical fertilizers, nuclear

armaments, over-consumption of the affluent in both the first as well as the third world... Moreover, what about the first world where population growth has declined yet environmental conditions have deteriorated?' (Patel, 1992, pp. 12-13)

While all this may seem very remote from the domain of psychology, dominant forms of psychology contribute to these problems by subscribing to a normative model of the family, through researching mothering and child development as though each woman only had one child (inaccurate even in the North) (Munn, 1991), and in reflecting the widespread medical and patriarchal assumption that mothering is the primary psychological issue for women.

### **Education For All?**

Similar problems attend the emphasis on female education. It is widely documented that women's education correlates with both reduced fertility rates and increased child survival rates. More often the association between maternal education and fertility is simply stated rather than interpreted. When put forward, explanations vary, ranging from raising women's status in the family and empowering her to be more assertive over birth control (Vittachi, 1989), or in terms of child survival, that women's literacy correlates with class, or her ability to buy tinned baby food and thus reduce the risks of infection (Sathyamala, *et al.*, 1986). This link between education and aspects of reproduction has led to rationales for girls' education being formulated specifically on the grounds of its supposed impact on future children. 'Educate a girl and you educate a nation' reads the caption to a picture of girls and young women in school in Anadhura Vittachi's (1989) book *Stolen Childhood*. Even more disturbingly girls' education is promoted on the grounds of population control. 'Education is the best contraceptive' was the slogan of the World Bank 'Poverty Report' in 1986. In Colcough with Lewin's (1993) UNICEF and Overseas Development Agency (ODA) funded research into the factors relevant for achieving primary education for all children, they report that support for this (principally from the World Bank):

was informed by the growing amount of evidence which demonstrated that primary schools were truly productive in a strictly economic sense, and that they affected people's behaviour in ways that supported a wide range of development goals. (Colcough with Lewin, 1993, p. 26)

It is apparent from the frequency with which fertility rates appear within the text that critical among the 'wide range of development goals' is population control:

Data from the World Fertility Survey indicate the strength of a decline in fertility associated with education: a comparison of women with up to three years and those with seven or more years of schooling reveals a reduction in total fertility rates by between two and three children for each of the African, Asian and Latin American regions. The negative relationship between these variables appear to be stronger when schooling is widely spread amongst the population. The presence of these externalities obviously adds to the case for universalizing primary schooling. (Colcough with Lewin, 1993, p. 30)

This is summarised thus:

Again the importance of female education must be emphasised: creating schooled and literate women is critically important as a means of enhancing

both present and future human capabilities. (Colcough with Lewin, 1993, p. 32)

Hence the elision between woman as mother and girl as pupil means that a double move takes place: not only are women primarily considered in terms of reproductive activities, but childhood is so thoroughly gendered that 'the girl child' is regarded as an incipient woman, and thus a future mother. It is paradoxical that within dominant Northern developmental psychological models, the *invisibility* of gender, and correspondingly implicit celebration of culturally masculine qualities works to pathologise girls' reasoning (Gilligan, 1982) and educational achievements (Walkerline *et al.*, 1989). But in the Southern context, the *visibility* of gender functions to combine the oppressions of being a child and being a woman together for 'the girl child'.

What this discussion of educational access suggests is that, in contrast to the gender-free discourses of childhood and adolescence in the North, which offer some scope for manoeuvre for girls and young women (as Hudson's, 1984, interviews with 'adolescent girls' suggests), it seems that 'girl children' of the South are scarcely children at all. They are girls. This is an issue that is either ignored by or only inconsistently addressed by the conceptions of 'rights' that underpin conventional views of development, and I return to this later. What should be noted at this stage are the ways North-South relations distribute salience of gender within psychological models of development, such that it is girls' gendered categorisation, rather than specifically their status as children or young people, that is made topical in the South. Clearly the problems of conceptual absences and salience that here are allocated as a function of their geographical distribution recall discussions about the limits of identities portrayed as static and additive (cf. Bondi, 1993). In the arena of international development policy and programming we see such conceptualisations being acted out in a particularly clear and problematic way.

### The Economisation of Development

Let me emphasise that, for some parties at least, subscribing to arguments which make women's and girls' entitlements conditional upon supposed national or international benefits is no doubt an effective strategy to enlist support from organisations for whom women's welfare or rights are not priorities. Nevertheless, the trend towards marketing human rights in economic terms threatens to fuse state and religion to set up new forms of fundamentalisms governing women's bodies and minds. Humanitarian arguments for the promotion of child survival and child development are now taking something of a background role, and economic arguments are presented as the most persuasive. McGuire & Austin's (1987) UNICEF report *Beyond Survival* is subtitled *Children's growth for national development*, and the economic rationale—in terms of production and productivity, education, and reduced demands on health care resources—is presented first and occupies the most space, with less than half a page on the 'humanitarian rationale', which ends with a warning about society squandering its potential (p. 22). Child growth promotion becomes something to 'sell' in the market-place. They introduce their report with the following:

Identifying growth failure as a pervasive injustice is not sufficient reason for a policy maker to allocate scarce resources in attacking the problem. In the real world of budget deficits and negative real growth in revenues, new endeavours must make their case in competition with other important or existing or new

programmes, and the resource allocation often rests on economic efficiency and political expedience...Traditionally, advocacy efforts to promote growth in children have emphasised the humanitarian rationale. We will now set forth the economic case. (McGuire & Austin, 1987, p. 6)

Similarly in a section on 'Family planning' in its 1992 Annual Report, UNICEF talks in terms of 'returns':

Experience confirms that when CSD [child survival and development] and family planning are undertaken together, the returns are greater than either could accomplish on its own. (UNICEF Annual Report, 1992, p. 17)

However, the abstraction of the language of 'returns' and 'benefits' fails to specify *who* benefits. Colcough with Lewin (1993) say:

...earlier in this book we reviewed evidence which shows (Chapter 1) that providing girls with primary (and secondary) education is critical to economic progress...It is, then, a profound irony that the benefits of primary schooling are especially high for girls, yet that underenrolments are strongly concentrated among them. (Colcough with Lewin, 1993, p. 264)

All this begs the question of whether the benefits are *for* girls, or for economies of countries which are pressured into placing population control above all other health and welfare interventions. The move in international agency programming from 'welfare' to 'workfare', that is from giving grants or subsidies to setting up schemes for self-employment, suggests that 'enterprise' can be the solution to poverty. Again economicistic rationales prevail over those of genuine development, with participation within the design and running of income generating projects increasingly being promoted on efficiency rather than democratic grounds (Kabeer, 1992; Peace & Hulme, 1993). Reviewing the discourses deployed by advocates of Women In Development, Kabeer (1992) notes that the rationale for women to be targeted for projects moved in the 1980s from welfare considerations to calling for women to be recognised as productive agents and an underutilised resource. She criticises this move as setting up welfare and efficiency as competitive rather than complementary: welfare provision supports women's efficiency. Moreover, in terms of the efficiency of health care provision, Sathyamala *et al.* (1986) report that the association of health care with coercive distribution of birth control devices leads to women in India being suspicious of and less likely to use health services. Thus such measures actively reduce women's (and children's) access to services.

### **Development for Whom? Psychological Challenges**

I have been arguing that the current discourses of psychological development provide a polarised representation of who develops and where, which maps on to the North–South divide (and the various norths and souths within the North and South). It also appears that the process of economic development all too often is at the expense of women's and girls' personal development, that is, that measures laying claim to women's and girls' interests may not function in those ways.

The slippage of unit of analysis from individual girl to the rhythms of economic planning reflects a project of homogenisation and abstraction common to both discourses of development: that of developmental psychology and of economic development. Both elaborate a developing subject that reinscribes rational individualism—itself a peculiarly Northern construction that owes its origins to strategies of population management and

control. In developmental psychological models efficiency considerations are paramount, with the child portrayed as a resource to be cultivated, maximised towards the goal of (gender-allocated spheres of) production (Rose, 1990). The rational unitary subject of psychology is an abstraction, a construction of tools of classification and measurement no less than is the manufacture of the monster of 'population' from peoples of the South (Duden, 1992). In this sense international agencies like UNICEF have no need to cast their development goals in economicistic terms, since these already structure the psychological models they draw upon.

Now at a time when feminist critiques are challenging the unity of the category 'woman', and black women are challenging the commonality of black and white feminist goals (Amos & Parmar, 1984; Carby, 1987), the challenge for psychology is, firstly, to recognise that unitary psychological models function as normative, regulatory apparatuses. This leads to, secondly, the recognition that the models reflect a Northern-based modern progressivism which maintains the opposition between North and South. This opposition reproduces the more general economic development discourse which positions the South as lacking, or as needing to catch up with the development of North. The discourse of development therefore legitimises the homogenisation of all cultures and globalization to that of Euro-US (Sachs, 1992). We need to reconceptualise our attachment to 'the child' within developmental psychological models as no longer the essential emergent or authentic self awaiting realisation, but as an ideological artefact which suppresses class, gender, and cultural differences, and which reproduces inequalities between North and South. When psychology has dissolved into multiple, diverse, and fragmented psychologies then the project of theorising children's, girls', boys', women's, men's practical developmental needs becomes more possible.

### Rights and Wrongs: women and children

It may seem as though the above proposals decry or diminish international child protection work that uses discourses of children's needs or children's rights. This is not my aim. However, the discourse of rights also needs to be scrutinised for its adequacy in promoting the interests of women and children, both together and separately. Historically, the notion of rights is linked to that of citizenship, in which women and, to an even greater extent children, are ambivalently positioned. Moreover, as feminist political theorists are now pointing out, the appeal to equal rights is predicated on a social contractual model of 'civil society' in which claims to equal status (through the concept of fraternity) are precisely exercised in relation to access to, and control of, women and children. The subject who exercises rights is thereby designated masculine. As Ann Phillips (1987) puts it:

because the family is now completely out of the picture, liberalism can more plausibly pretend that we are indeed the private and isolated individuals on which its theories rest. In seemingly universal concern over the limits of the state and the freedoms of the individual, liberalism talks in effect of a world occupied by men. (p. 15)

Modern liberal democratic discourse, then, instead of invoking traditional patriarchal authority, justified its social arrangements by naturalising women's subordinate status (Pateman, 1989). From this perspective, where the division between public and private—so central to the conditions endured by women and children—is the structuring principle

of liberal measures such as UN humanitarian policies, the extent to which liberal rights measures can address the needs of women and children appears circumscribed:

The fraternal social contract story shows that the categories and practices of civil society cannot simply be universalised to women. The social contract is a modern patriarchal pact that establishes men's sex right over women, and the civil individual has been constructed in opposition to women and all that our bodies symbolize, so how can we become full members of civil society or parties to the fraternal contract? (Pateman, 1989, p. 52)

While claims for women's rights have been made on the basis of extending to women the freedoms enjoyed by men, these have been appealed to by virtue of rights due to adults in general. Hence women's rights have been counterposed to children's. Notwithstanding the general tendency to assimilate women's interests with those of children in a manner repudiated by feminist analyses (but largely reflected within contemporary UN policies), there are additional complications in the intersecting politics of equal rights legislation which do much to explain the mutual suspicion of women's and children's rights movements. In her historical analysis of English custody and divorce legislation, Susan Maidment (1984) highlights how the 'welfare principle' as the paramount consideration within child custody cases emerged between 1886 and 1925 (and culminating in the *Guardianship of Infants Act 1925*) both in relation to, and as a device to counter, feminist demands for equality within family law. (Prior to this issues of child protection were more concerned with social stability and reduction of demands on state welfare [Eekelaar, 1986]). Hence reductions in the legal authority of men in families were justified in terms of their responsibilities as fathers (in relation to children) rather than as husbands (in relation to women), making the concessions to women's custody and divorce rights secondary to the interests of their children:

Each time that women's organisations sought to achieve joint guardianship between wife and husband, Parliament extracted a compromise, in order to quieten them, which allowed women rights only incidentally to extending the principle of the child's welfare... The rise of the welfare principle did not come essentially out of concern for the interest of the child but out of the fight of women's groups for equality of legal rights. (Maidment, 1984, pp. 145-146)

Notwithstanding the multiple determinations of its emergence, however, the welfare or 'best interests' principle has become the cornerstone of national and international legislation about children. But the inescapably normative content of rights poses problems in equating children's interests and their rights, as children are not considered the best party to judge their 'best interests', and because the content of these interests is informed by legal practice which itself recycles familial ideology as either common-sense or professional expertise (Dingwall & Eekelaar, 1986). Moreover, as Jo Boyden & Andy Hudson point out in their Minority Rights Group Report on children (1985), since children are not always considered able to exercise those claims on their own behalf, children's rights are determined in terms of duties and responsibilities towards children rather than the traditional understanding of rights as 'a relationship between two people, one asserting a claim and the other recognising it' (p. 4). John Eekelaar (1986) notes in relation to English law that this tends to mean that the 'basic' and 'developmental' interests of children take priority over those of 'autonomy' (and despite the rhetoric recent developments show little evidence of changing this; see Bell, 1993). While the 'three Ps' (Cantwell, 1992) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child move from Protection and Provision to Participation, consulting children (or adults for that matter)

in aid and development projects does not necessarily mean that the services or interventions will actually reflect the wishes of the so-called project partners, as UNICEF itself recognises (Drucker, 1986; Hart, 1992; Öğün & Houston Smith, 1992).

The issue of child participation highlights problems, not only within the notion of child rights, but within the concept of rights generally. Rights are by definition generalised and universalised principles, which like the psychological subject and political theory they reflect through the public-private opposition, are abstracted and individualised. Available representations of psychological development, like the more general models of economic development, mask these key tensions of abstraction and individualism. These tensions also lie within child liberation discourses and child rights discourses in the conflict between evaluating children within their cultural context and treating them as equal subjects transcending cultural practice:

The mundane facts of children's everyday experience have meant that liberatory aspirations are uneasily linked with the demand for rights. The one keeps children outside cultural constraints; the other insists that they enter on comparable terms to adults. (Holland, 1992, p. 84)

Two points are relevant here with respect to the above discussion of rights discourse. Firstly, as the earlier analysis of 'the girl child' also demonstrated, it is impossible to divide absolutely issues relevant to women from those of children. This is in contrast to the way discourse of rights sets up parties as distinct and competing rather than continuous or allied (Denise Riley, 1987, also makes this point in relation to apparent contradictions within feminist campaigns for child care provision in the North). Secondly, the rights discourse presumes an equality of positions that effectively denies the histories of class, gender and cultural inequalities that constitute what it means to be a child (or a mother) in any particular time and place. This homogenisation of subjectivity sets up a corresponding opposition between individual and society, which is reflected in tensions within aid images between the abstraction and locatedness of development. To quote Pat Holland again:

The aim is for a recognition of differences that do not lead to conflict, but this is precisely where the image of childhood runs up against its limits. Childhood is sought as that space beyond conflict, before those rigid differences have taken hold, as a point where "humanity" aspires to an impossible escape from "society". But children live out their lives structured by the imperatives of culture, gender and language. An effective demand for children's rights can take place only within these structures. (Holland, 1992, p. 99)

In the case of rights legislation for women and children, it could be argued that equal positions are presumed precisely because this effaces those different histories, and thereby empowers by accordinig equal rights to previously disadvantaged groups. Diane Elson (1992) follows Kabeer (1991) in arguing for the importance of distinguishing normative and material entitlements in recognising women's culturally structured economic vulnerability to inform international interventions to address women's poverty. International agencies are also beginning to recognise how policies for women and children cannot occur without structural changes. The 'Further Actions' section of the United Nations Children's Fund 1992 Policy Review progress report on *Achievements made in the Implementation of the UNICEF Policy on Women in Development, including the Situation of the Girl Child*, includes the following statement:

While culture is a crucial bond in society, it can sometimes be used unquestioningly to perpetuate a system of inequality against girl children and women merely for being born female. Therefore, fundamental changes are needed in the socialisation and education of children, both girls and boys, as well as in the complex system of attitudes, power and privileges that determine the allocation of resources and entitlements between women and men within the family, community and nation.

Assuming the banner of the 'rights of the girl-child' thus sets the discourse of human rights against that of respect for cultural practices in two ways: either (in the case of international aid and development bodies) it invites the charge of cultural imperialism in assuming the moral high ground to ride rough-shod over religious and cultural traditions, or, conversely (in the case of multiculturalists), it paralyses criticism for fear of being paternalistic and culturally chauvinistic (see for example, Yuval Davis, 1992, for an analysis of how these debates have been played out in Britain, and the journal *Women Against Fundamentalism* for international analysis). While these are complex and urgent issues, critical psychologists are disabled from entering debates about the goals and contexts of development by the predominance of models of which the ideological overdeterminations either prescribe the answers or proscribe the questions. Failure to enter those discussions vacates a key arena of intervention in the struggle between the polarities of homogenisation and differentiation. It leaves the domain of psychological development open to the co-option of those liberals who can only accord equality by denying difference, or to the reactionaries who treat cultural differences as essential and inevitable.

To summarise: questions of the functions and limitations of a liberal rights framework, exemplified within developmental psychology through interpretations and applications of international development policies such as the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, pose for feminist academics and policy-makers the challenge of moving beyond the assumption of the neutrality of scientific and professional practices, to grappling with the questions of power, privilege and justice which they involve. For developmental psychologists this means moving beyond universal models to attend both to differences and to the power relations that suppress and/or construct those differences. This is not to suggest that there are no 'universals', nor that in some circumstances asserting universal needs or rights may not be strategically important (e.g. Kerr, 1993). Rather, we should be attending to the impact of, and interventions made by, the attribution of either universals in, or differences of, demands or needs. In this sense, developmental psychologists have much to learn from critics of models of economic development, and feminists can gain from the articulation of both sets of issues in addressing the positions of women and children. For feminists committed to challenging the current organisation and distribution of psychological and economic development, we cannot afford to ignore how relations between gender and childhood inform, and are theorised within, international aid and development policies.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to Harriet Goodman, Information Officer of UNICEF UK for generous and attentive supply of material, Janet Batsleer, Ann Phoenix, Gill Peace, Uma Kothari and Vibhuti Patel for helpful discussions and provision of materials when I was first thinking about these issues, and Ian Parker for his comments on earlier drafts.

*Correspondence:* Erica Burman, Discourse Unit, Department of Psychology and Speech Pathology, The Manchester Metropolitan University, Hathersage Road, Manchester M13 0JA, UK.

## NOTES

- [1] I use the terms North and South as the widely used formulation to refer to inequalities structured through colonial and imperialist legacies and actualities that, broadly speaking, map on to the historical and current relations between countries of the northern hemisphere with those of the South. Other terms in circulation include the First/Third World polarity, West/Third World, 'developed/developing countries', or 'rich/poor'. Each set of terms carries its own history, problematic and problems, not least in its totalisation and homogenisation of complex and multiple political-geographical conditions. In adopting the formulation of North/South I am aware that this opposition is not appropriate for the situation of all countries, and I do not wish to ignore the differences within countries—there are many national, regional norths and souths within the northern and southern hemispheres. With this set of caveats, however, I want to claim that this formulation retains some usefulness in characterising the agency relations of donors and recipients elaborated within aid and development policies and programmes.
- [2] *All Our Children* was a television series broadcast in Britain in 1990 to coincide with the passing of, and UK ratification of, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It was concerned with raising issues of equal opportunity for all children in Britain, as in other countries.

## REFERENCES

AMOS, V. & PARMAR, P. (1984) Challenging imperial feminism, *Feminist Review*, 17, pp. 3–19.

ANTROBUS, P. (1989) Women in development, paper presented at *XVth Annual General Assembly of Development Non-Governmental Organisations*, Brussels, 18–21 April.

BATLIWALE, S. (1984) Rural energy situation—consequences for women's health, *Socialist Health Review*, 1, pp. 30–41.

BELL, V. (1993) Governing childhood: neo-liberalism and the law, *Economy & Society*, 22, pp. 390–405.

BONDI, L. (1993) Locating identity politics, in: M. KEITH & J. PALE (Eds) *Place and the Politics of Identity* (London, Routledge).

BOYDEN, J. (1990) Childhood and the policymakers: a comparative perspective on the globalization of childhood, in: A. JAMES & A. PROUT (Eds) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* (Lewes, Falmer Press).

BOYDEN, J. & HUDSON, A. (1985) *Children: rights and responsibilities* (London, Minority Rights Group).

BROUGHTON, J. (1988) The masculine authority of the cognitive, in: B. INHELDER (Ed.) *Piaget Today* (New York, Erlbaum).

BURMAN, E. (1993) The natural rights of the child, paper presented at the *International Society for Theoretical Society*, Saclas, France, April.

BURMAN, E. (1994a) Poor children: charity appeals and ideologies of childhood, *Changes*, 21, pp. 29–36.

BURMAN, E. (1994b) Innocents abroad: western fantasies of childhood and the inconography of emergencies, *Disasters*, 18, pp. 238–253.

BURMAN, E. (1994c) *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology* (London, Routledge).

BURMAN, E. (1995) What is it? Masculinity and femininity in the cultural representation of childhood, in: C. KRTZINGER & S. WILKINSON (Eds) *Feminism and Discourse* (London, Sage).

CANTWELL, N. (1992) The origins, development and significance of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in: S. DETRICK (Ed.) *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: a guide to the 'Travaux Préparatoires'* (Dordrecht, Martinus Nijhoff).

CARBY, H. (1987) Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood, in: M. ARNOT & G. WEINER (Eds) *Gender and the Politics of Schooling* (London, Hutchinson).

COLCOUGH, C. with LEWIN, K. (1993) *Educating All the Children: strategies for primary schooling in the South* (Oxford, Clarendon Press).

DINGWALL, R. & EEKELAAR, J. (1986) Judgements of Solomon: developmental psychology and family law, in: M. RICHARDS & P. LIGHT (Eds) *Children of Social Worlds* (Oxford, Polity Press).

DRUCKER, D. (1986) Viewpoint on community participation: now you see it, now you don't, *UNICEF News*, 124, pp. 2–3.

DUDEN, B. (1992) Population, in: W. SACHS (Ed.) *The Development Dictionary* (London, Zed Press).

EEKELAAR, J. (1986) The emergence of child rights, *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 6, pp. 161–182.

ELSON, D. (1992) Public action, poverty and development: a gender aware analysis, paper prepared for the Seminar on *Women in extreme poverty: integration of women's concerns in national development planning*, Division for Advancement of Women, United Nations Office at Vienna, November.

ENNEW, J. (1986) *The Sexual Exploitation of Children* (Oxford, Polity Press).

GILLIGAN, C. (1982) *In a Different Voice* (Boston, MA, Harvard University Press).

HARASIM, S. (Ed.) (1990) *The Postcolonial Critic, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (London, Routledge).

HART, R. (1992) Climbing the participation ladder, *First Call for Children*, 2 (April–June), p. 4.

HOLLAND, P. (1992) *What is a Child? Popular Images of Childhood* (London, Virago).

HUDSON, B. (1984) Femininity and adolescence, in: A. McROBBIE & M. NAVA (Eds) *Gender and Generation* (London, Macmillan).

KABEER, N. (1991) Gender dimensions of poverty. Analysis from Bangladesh, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 18.

KABEER, N. (1992) Feminist perspectives in development: a critical review, in: H. HINDS, A. PHOENIX & J. STACEY (Eds) *Working Out: new directions for women's studies* (Lewes, Falmer Press).

KERR, D. (Ed.) (1993) *Ours By Right: women's rights as human rights* (London, Zed Press).

MCGUIRE, J. & AUSTIN, J. (1987) *Beyond Survival: children's growth for national development* (New York, Assignment Children: UNICEF).

MAIDMENT, S. (1984) *Child Custody and Divorce* (London, Croom Helm).

MARSHALL, H. (1991) The social construction of motherhood: an analysis of childcare and parenting manuals, in: A. PHOENIX, A. WOOLLETT & E. LLOYD (Eds) *Motherhood: meanings, practices and ideologies* (London, Sage).

MUNN, P. (1991) Mothering more than one child, in: A. PHOENIX, A. WOOLLETT & E. LLOYD (Eds) *Motherhood: meanings, practices and ideologies* (London, Sage).

MYERS, R. (1992) *The Twelve Who Survive: strengthening programmes of child care and development in the Third World* (London and New York, Routledge/ UNESCO).

ÖĞÜN, R. & HOUSTON SMITH, K. (1992) *Innocenti Global Seminar on Participatory Development, Summary Report*, Florence, Italy, UNICEF International Child Development Centre, Spedale delgi Innocenti.

PATEL, V. (1989) Sex determination and sex preselection tests in India: modern techniques for femicide, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 21 (November 1), pp. 1–11.

PATEL, V. (1992) Women and structural adjustment in India, paper presented at the *Development Studies Institute, London School of Economics*, 27 November.

PATEMAN, C. (1989) *The Disorder of Women* (Oxford, Polity Press).

PEACE, G. & HULME, D. (1993) *Children and Income Generating Programmes* (London, Save the Children Fund).

PHILLIPS, A. (1987) Introduction, in: A. PHILLIPS (Ed.) *Feminism and Equality* (Oxford, Blackwell).

RILEY, D. (1987) 'The serious burdens of love?' Some questions on child-care, feminism and socialism, in: A. PHILLIPS (Ed.) *Feminism and Equality* (Oxford, Blackwell).

ROSE, N. (1985) *The Psychological Complex* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul).

ROSE, N. (1990) *Governing the Soul* (London, Routledge).

SACHS, W. (Ed.) (1992) *The Development Dictionary: a guide to knowledge as power* (London, Zed Press).

SATHYAMALA, C., SUNDARAM, N. & BHANOT, N. (1986) *Taking Sides: the choices before the health worker* (New Delhi, Asian Network for Innovative Training Trust).

SEN, A. (1990) More than 100 million women are missing, *New York Review of Books*, 61–68, 20 December.

SPIVAK, G. CHAKRAVORTY (1988) Can the subaltern speak? in: C. NELSON & L. GROSSMAN (Eds) *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (London, Macmillan).

STAINTON ROGERS, R. & STAINTON ROGERS, W. (1992) *Stories of Childhood: shifting agendas of child concern* (Lewes, Harvester Press).

UNICEF (1992) *1992 UNICEF Annual Report* (United Nations Children's Fund).

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND (1992) *Achievements Made in the Implementation of the UNICEF Policy on Women in Development, including the Situation of the Girl Child: policy review* (United Nations Economic and Social Council).

URWIN, C. (1985) Constructing motherhood: the persuasion of normal development, in: C. STEEDMAN, C. URWIN & V. WALKERDINE (Eds) *Language, Gender and Childhood* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul).

VITTACHI, A. (1989) *Stolen Childhood: in search of the rights of the child* (London, Polity Press).

WALKERDINE, V. (1988) *The Mastery of Reason: cognitive development and the production of rationality* (London, Routledge).

WALKERDINE, V. & LUCEY, H. (1989) *Democracy in the kitchen: regulating mothers and socialising daughters* (London, Virago).

WALKERDINE, V. & the Girls and Mathematics Unit (1989) *Counting Girls Out* (London, Virago).

WILLIAMSON, J. (1986) Nuclear family, no thanks!, in *Consuming Passions: the dynamics of popular culture* (London, Marion Boyars).

WOODHEAD, M. (1990) Psychology and the cultural construction of children's needs, in: A. JAMES & A. PROUT (Eds) *Construction and Reconstructing Childhood* (Lewes, Falmer Press).

YUVAL DAVIS, N. (1992) Fundamentalism, multiculturalism and women in Britain, in: J. DONALD & A. RATTANSI (Eds) *'Race', Culture and Difference* (London, Sage).