

## **BECOMING PART OF THIS WORLD: ANTHROPOLOGY, INFANCY, AND CHILDHOOD**

HEATHER MONTGOMERY

### *Introduction*

IN 1973, Charlotte Hardman published an article in *JASO* entitled 'Can there be an Anthropology of Childhood?' Long before childhood became of general interest to anthropologists, she argued that children were a worthy subject of study. They were, she claimed, a further example of a group with 'muted voices' and in fact possessed a culture of their own. She challenged the idea that children were interesting only in so far as they were subject to processes of socialization and enculturation. She argued that anthropologists had left the study of children to psychologists such as Vygotsky (1962) and Piaget (1932) and sociologists such as Ariès (1962), and had not taken up the challenge of looking at children as subjects in their own right, with their own forms of language, meanings, and understandings. She concluded that there could legitimately be an anthropology of childhood.

Her article remained obscure, however, and it was another ten years before anthropologists, most notably Allison James, Jean La Fontaine, and Judith Ennew, began to look seriously at children. It was not until the mid-1980s and early 1990s that childhood, and children themselves, came to be seen as valid and valuable subjects in their own right. In 1986, Jean La Fontaine wrote:

In general, anthropology has retained an outdated view of children as raw material, unfinished specimens of the social beings whose ideas and behaviour are the proper subject matter for social science. (1986: 10)

Several anthropologists recognized this and took up the challenge of seeing children as something other than 'raw material'; their work showed a new interest in children both methodologically and ethnographically. Ennew (1986), Qvortrup (1994), James and Prout (1999), and others began to use the notion of 'child-centred' research, which involved conceptualizing children as social actors and agents, capable of participating in making sense of their own lives, and of describing and explaining their actions, motivations, and meanings. It aimed to understand children's affects on adults and their communities, and concentrated on them as human beings rather than as 'human becomings'. It rejected previous studies of childhood that saw it purely in adult terms, with an inherent bias towards children as 'less than' adults, whose opinions and behaviour were viewed as incomplete and incompetent (Waksler 1991). Equally importantly, it challenged previous methodologies of finding out about children. A child-centred anthropology viewed children as the best informants of their own lives and worlds, and therefore insisted on the necessity of interviewing children directly and taking on board their subjectivities.

Child-centred anthropology entailed bringing children in from the margins of anthropological and sociological literature, where references to them had previously been located, and placing them at the centre of research projects. This did not mean focusing only on children, or constructing a sub-culture of society where children existed apart from their families and communities. Rather, it meant that research on children would attempt to understand their perspectives, their links to their families, and would examine the importance of their relationships as they saw them. The roles they played in shaping their society and their social importance to their families were increasingly acknowledged. They began to be understood as independent agents, although constrained by their age, their physical size, and also other people's reactions towards them (James and Prout 1995). Wider issues of community were not written out of the picture in this perspective, but the emphasis was shifted. Instead of looking at children as merely the recipients of enculturation or of rearing practices, children were re-conceptualized as active agents.

This work undoubtedly needed to be done, and it has produced a rich variety of studies on childhood and children in various cross-cultural contexts. It has removed the study of childhood from the study of socialization or enculturation, which, as Peter Gow observes,

...necessarily imply that what children do is directed at the future goal of being a fully socialised or enculturated adult. Not only are these teleological views biologically unsustainable, they also significantly distort the manner in which the specificities of human ontogenies are already predicated on the complexities of human social relations. (2001: 1)

Childhood has now become a field of study in its own right, and children have become participants in research, which has revealed new levels of complexities in

their lives. Anthropologists studying childhood have also challenged the stranglehold that forms of developmental psychology have held over childhood studies, setting universal standards for all children, and claiming an unchallengeable biological and scientific model for doing so. Similarly, researchers attempting to understand childhood have examined issues such as children's agency, techniques of research with children, and ethnographies of children in 'especially difficult circumstances', such as street children, refugee children, child soldiers or child prostitutes. Studies on the latter in particular have problematized the category of childhood and examined expectations concerning children and the extent to which children who do not fit a certain model of childhood are reclassified as non-children. This has also meant that ethnographic research on children has been most closely linked to applied anthropology, becoming related to governmental and non-governmental policy, and moving away from academia.

However, there is some danger in this promotion of childhood as a new field of study for anthropologists, in that childhood risks becoming separate from more theoretical anthropological concerns, and consequently marginalized from mainstream anthropology. In the 1970s, Hardman claimed that children, like women and so many other groups, were a muted voice. Those who followed her attempted to position children as a neglected or un-researched group with their own agency, roles, and world-views that had been ignored by anthropologists. While partially true, the idea of children waiting to be recognized by ethnographers observing their world needs to be challenged. An anthropology of childhood that claims children as yet another overlooked or ignored group risks turning them into the latest 'lost tribe' of anthropology, an exoticized curiosity with few links to wider issues in anthropology. The 'anthropology of women' that flourished in the 1970s encountered exactly this problem, and while women had undoubtedly been overlooked in traditional anthropology, the solution was not ethnographies of women that looked at them in isolation from men: it was through an examination of gender and of the construction of women in relation to men that women were incorporated into broader anthropological concerns. Similarly, if childhood is not to become an anthropological ghetto, it needs to build much stronger links to other anthropological work on age-sets, life cycles, personhood, and kinship.

### *Do We Still Need an Anthropology of Childhood?*

This article, therefore, will argue for another type of anthropology of childhood, one that is intimately connected with ideas of personhood, kinship, conception, and reproduction. This is often hinted at in descriptions of the anthropology of childhood, but rarely made explicit. For example, a report on a conference held at Brunel University in July 2001 claimed that childhood is 'a culturally specific category informed by particular ideas of personhood and political economy' (Ev-

ans and McLoughlin 2001: 27). Certainly the range of anthropologists present at this conference included many who are not usually associated with childhood, which indicated to me the scope and range that an anthropology of childhood might cover.

If there is to be an anthropology of childhood, it should go beyond looking at birth as the beginning of childhood. Similarly, it should not rely on issues of socialization to underpin it. Processes of socialization that seek to transform a child into a fully competent adult are merely the continuation of a process that started long before birth, when issues of personhood and humanity are already crucial. Ideally, I believe that an anthropology of childhood can include the work of many anthropologists who would never consider themselves anthropologists of childhood, and who would indeed reject such a specialization. Childhood as a field of study is interesting to me not only for its attempts to uncover children's agency and role in culture, but because childhood lies at the heart of well-established anthropological issues concerning personhood and how humans are created. The question of who or what is a child can only be answered by a thorough examination of when life begins, when a child comes to be recognized as human, and when it is accepted as a full member of its community. An anthropology of childhood should thus encompass not only the role of children after birth, but also their status pre-birth and possibly even pre-conception, across multiple times and space. It must look at children who are of this world, as well as those who belong to other worlds, and must examine the cosmological, philosophical, and moral status of children as they pass between worlds. Ideally, therefore, an anthropology of childhood should complement and inform general areas of anthropological concern such as kinship, as well as embracing the more specific areas of enquiry such as the new reproductive technologies, or older reproductive technologies such as the couvade.

### *The Nature of Childhood*

Of course, this sort of anthropology of childhood means that children alone cannot be used as informants, and that ideas of children's agency, which have produced such rich ethnographic data recently, become less central. Those who work on the anthropology of childhood rarely have much to say about infants because of the impossibility of interviewing them or participating in their lives to any great extent. Ideally, however, childhood studies should be able to go beyond looking at children only when they are fully social people and should link examinations of childhood with other anthropological interests. It should encompass a much broader range of interests under the heading of childhood, so that any study of children encompasses their passage from before they are conceived to their achievement of full personhood.

Examining the status of children raises difficult questions about the nature of humanity and of personhood, questions that have concerned both anthropologists and philosophers for generations. As Conklin and Morgan put it:

Every society must determine how its youngest will come to achieve the status of persons, how they will be recognized and granted a place within a human community.... In all societies, the complexities and contradictions in normative ideologies of personhood are heightened during the transitional moments of gestation, birth and infancy, when personhood is imminent but not assured. (1996: 657–8)

The child lies at the nexus of these beliefs, in that its existence challenges the boundaries of where life begins and raises questions about the exact nature of personhood. A peri-natal infant is of interest to anthropologists not because it exists in some sub-cultural world of childhood or even a pre-cultural, 'natural' world, but because its exact nature is so often ambiguous; it is clearly a human but not so obviously a person. Most cultures accept that there are boundaries and stages of development in children, which may range from the understandings of the person as existing outside human space and time (such as spirit children; see further below) to becoming persons at conception, at ensoulment (or quickening) or at birth, or at some point afterwards. What is apparent, however, is that these questions about the nature of childhood cannot be understood without reference to cultural beliefs about personhood or humanity. By looking at the nature of childhood, anthropologists are encouraged to examine these issues concerning when a child is fully human.

Many of those who have conducted ethnographic work among children have concentrated exclusively on children as agents. In doing so, they have tended to overlook previous anthropologists who have written pertinently and illuminatingly about childhood, without necessarily focusing on children themselves. There are the obvious examples of Margaret Mead or Ruth Benedict, of course, as well as important studies of childhood that have sometimes been overlooked, such as those of spirit children in Australia, studied by Phyllis Kaberry (1939) in the 1930s, patterns of education researched by Meyer Fortes (1970) in Africa and Raymond Firth (1970) in Polynesia, and the status of twins, written about by Isaac Shapera as early as 1927. Certainly much of the work on Amazonia, such as that concerned with the *couvade*, directly links ideas about childhood with ideas about personhood and humanity. These studies are vital to current anthropologists wishing to study childhood.

*The Boundaries of Childhood*

Conception, gestation, birth, and infancy are problematic in many social contexts, and it is unsurprising that much recent anthropological attention has been focused on them. Work on the new reproductive technologies has revitalized studies of kinship and issues of personhood, but it is rare for these to be linked to an anthropology of childhood. A gap has been left between these two recent anthropological sub-disciplines, which could very usefully inform each other. While anthropologists studying new reproductive technologies have focused directly on issues of personhood, they have largely excluded children who have already been born, while those anthropologists who have examined childhood have overlooked the nature of infants, both pre- and post-birth. This point is made explicit in one of the few articles that does attempt to bridge this gap, namely Wendy James's 'Placing the Unborn: On the Social Recognition of New Life', in which she argues for a more complex understanding of the relationship between the foetus and the born child. Using ethnography from Australia and Africa, she argues, following Mauss, against the tendency to place the foetus in the realms of nature and to view a child as becoming cultural only upon birth or soon after.

At some point in the continuum of organic development, either before or after birth, a significant socio-moral identification takes place: what Marcel Mauss has called the 'recognition' of an individual child. 'Recognition' implies a pragmatic acceptance, conferring on an embryo, foetus, or infant at least a provisional 'personhood' and an extension of basic physical care. This is not universal or automatic. Not all early human life is socially 'recognized' in this sense and partly as a consequence of the nature of such recognition not all survives (James 2000: 170).

The rest of this paper will look at three very different case-studies concerning the child pre-birth and post-birth, arguing that the issues they raise should be significant to those who are interested in an anthropology of childhood, because they deal with fundamental issues concerning the nature of childhood. They problematize the boundaries between life and non-life, and raise questions about when children are seen as fully social beings.

*The Born Alive Bill*

The first case to be examined is a legal attempt in the US that aimed to set definitive boundaries for when a child comes into being. In 2000, a rather odd bill called the Born Alive Bill was brought before the American Senate. The Bill focused on the status of failed abortions—babies who were aborted but who were somehow still born alive. Pro-life groups wanted assurances from the courts that these babies would be treated like any other premature babies, given immediate medical help, placed in incubators, and treated as full human beings with the same rights to medical care as any other child. The aim of the Bill was to establish, in law, legal

personhood for all babies who were born alive, whatever the circumstances of their birth. One of the sponsors, Constitution Subcommittee Chairman Steve Chabot (an Ohio Republican), categorically rejected 'the notion that an abortion survivor is not a person' (Palmer 2001). His supporters attempted to bestow full personhood on a child at birth and set birth as the definitive boundary between a child and a foetus. In contrast, critics of the Bill argued that birth was not a particularly significant boundary, and that foetuses who survived abortion were not babies but aborted foetuses and should be left to die. Those who opposed the Bill were thus placed in the position of claiming that it is not birth that represents the boundary between life and non-life, but that life is dependent on the mother's intention. If she wanted an abortion, her choice must be respected and the baby must be left to die.

In many ways, this case might be dismissed as a curiosity, a further salvo by the pro-life lobby in America in their continuing war against legal abortion. It might be argued that the issue of foetuses who survive abortion is just another instance of pro-life groups playing on the squeamishness many people might feel at the idea. Certainly, none of the supporters of this bill claimed that the numbers of foetuses born alive after abortion is high, nor are they very specific on how many foetuses born alive are truly viable. Instead they concentrate on gruesome first-person testimony, such as that of a nurse, Jill Stanek, who claimed that she had 'retrieved a 10-inch, 21-week-old Down's syndrome baby from a soiled utility room and cradled him and rocked him for the 45 minutes that he lived' (Leo 2000: 1).

This legislation might be seen as largely symbolic, therefore, drawing attention to the anomalies that exist in modern medicine that allow a foetus to be cared for and saved at 23 weeks in one wing of a hospital and aborted in another. However, it is also an interesting departure for pro-life groups, who are now privileging birth as the boundary between life and non-life and between a potential and an actual person. Usually, in the ideology of these groups, this distinction does not exist: a child is both human and a person from conception onwards, and birth is not especially significant. Demanding that a foetus who survives abortion should be given full medical attention actually reinforces birth as a significant boundary between life and personhood in a way that is not wholly consistent with their ideology. However, there is no evidence that this Bill is anything other than an attempt to challenge and erode existing abortion laws. By drawing attention to these extreme, if unusual circumstances, pro-life groups are not clarifying the distinction between foetus and child, but muddling it in preparation for future claims that foetuses and new-born babies are morally indistinguishable and should both be acknowledged as full persons.

However, it is interesting to note that even anti-abortion groups do not claim full personhood for foetuses in all circumstances. For instance, while abortions at any stage of pregnancy might be condemned as the killing of fully human babies,

miscarried babies are not given the full burials that new-borns would be given, and that might be expected from people who believe that a foetus is a person in exactly the same way as an adult. In contrast, the Royal College of Nurses in the UK, a body that supports abortion rights, is currently demanding the social recognition of aborted and miscarried foetuses. They claim that 500,000 foetuses each year are disposed of as clinical waste in a way that is neither 'respectful or sensitive' (Carvel 2001: 3). In 2001 they called for an end to this practice and demanded communal funerals for these foetuses, with the possibility of individual funerals if the parents wished (Carvel 2001). This would confer on foetuses a special status as beings who deserve some ceremony of social recognition, a status that would considerably complicate the position of legal abortion in the UK.

These cases, while interesting in themselves, might be dismissed as curiosities. However, I believe that they should be of significance to anthropologists because they touch on fundamental questions of personhood. In particular, they provide material for those interested in childhood because they raise such essential questions about where childhood begins and the difference between foetuses, children, and adults. This is not simply a matter of terminology: the issue of when a foetus becomes a child and the exact status of a foetus or baby during pregnancy is cultural, political, and, indeed, personal. Rather, if an anthropology of childhood is to be viable, then it must look at the boundaries of childhood, as well as at children who have been born and socially recognised as children. Later in the article, two further cases will be discussed in which the boundaries of childhood inform wider notions of personhood and society. If children are different from adults and also from the unborn, then anthropologists with an interest in children should be concerned not only with children after they have been born, but with cases like the above, when the boundaries separating children from non-children are being discussed.

### *Foetuses and Personhood*

The question of abortion is fraught with religious, ethical, and political issues. Different societies have very different understandings of the distinction between human life (or potential life) and full personhood, and this distinction is often focused on children. It is clear at the outset, therefore, that there is a need to distinguish between different states of being and to see that being a human, or a potential human, and being a person are two different things. For ease of exposition here, personhood will mean a recognized social individual who is acknowledged to be a full member of society. In contrast, the phrase 'being human' will denote a human life that is potentially a person but not necessarily one yet. In countries such as the UK, these distinctions are often legal and bureaucratic (although different individuals will obviously disagree with these definitions). Under English



law, for example, a child is not considered to be living until he or she is born. It is only at this point that law and medical practice both afford the child full protection as a person. Before this moment, a child has no legal status and no claim to personhood. Until 1984, if a child was stillborn, it could not officially be named on a birth certificate, although a certificate is nonetheless required for a stillbirth. Such bureaucracy thus recognized that a stillborn child was human, and this fact was recorded officially, but it was not recognized as a full person, with a name and an individual identity.

Most other societies have recognized distinct stages in the development of personhood, of which birth is only one, and not necessarily the most important. The history of embryology is a well-established field, and questions concerning the beginnings of life and the nature of humanity have been argued over for millennia. Discourses about the nature of embryos should parallel those about the nature of childhood, yet there is rarely any crossover between the two fields of study. The boundary between personhood and non-personhood is often located at some point within childhood yet the relationship between childhood and personhood is not always made explicit. Thus studies of childhood, like those on personhood, need to look at several different issues: when life starts; when a child becomes human; and when it becomes a person.

The process of dividing a child's development into three stages has a long history. Aristotle famously argued that the foetus processed through three stages: at first, it is plant-like, because it grows but does not feel; then it becomes like an animal, because it feels and acquires sensation; finally, it wakes in the womb and becomes fully alive (although male and female foetuses develop at different rates: males become active and formed at 40 days, while females do not develop fully until 90 days of gestation (Dunstan 1988)). Similarly, the Qur'ān talks of the foetus having three separate stages before it becomes a person. In the Hadith (the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad, second only in authority to the Qur'ān), it is written:

The Prophet said: 'Each of you is constituted in your mother's womb for forty days as a *nutfa*, then it becomes a *'alaqa* for an equal period, then a *mudgha* for another equal period, then the angel is sent, and he breathes the soul into it.' (Cited in Mussallam 1990: 38)

Similarly, the chapters of the Qur'ān called *The Believers* (Sura XXIII, 12–14) relate that, after man is formed from a 'quintessence of clay':

Then we placed him as semen in a firm receptacle;  
Then we formed the semen into a blood like clot;  
Then we formed the clot into a lump of flesh; then we formed out of that  
lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh.  
(Cited *ibid.*)

Many Islamic scholars have used this passage to argue that the first stage of development, when the foetus is simply semen, lasts 40 days; the second stage, when the foetus is a 'blood-like' clot, also lasts 40 days; and that the third stage, when the foetus becomes 'a lump of flesh', also lasts 40 days. It is only after this process, at 120 days of gestation, that the soul enters the foetus and it becomes possible to talk about personhood.

However, these ideas of the foetus's development, and the gradual three-stage process during which the foetus moves towards ensoulment and personhood, all take place within an approximate nine-month period, a time given the special term 'gestation' and based on biological stages of development. The development of the foetus, although seen as divinely inspired and created, occurs within the womb and within a specific period. While different philosophical and religious traditions offer different stages of development and different explanations for these stages, there is little divergence of views on either the time-frame or location of development. Indeed, a bio-medical model is followed, in so far as the embryo is acknowledged as having been formed through the intercourse of a man and woman, and as growing within a woman's womb, where it can be seen to grow and to move. At a certain stage it can be seen as existing in human form and is recognizably human in its physiology (a fact skilfully used by pro-life activists in the US and elsewhere in their use of ultra-scan images that emphasize the physical similarities between an infant and a foetus).

It becomes much more complicated when we try to look at childhood in cultures whose views on foetuses and childhood are not based on a recognizable bio-medical model that understands the foetus as undergoing a series of developmental stages over a nine-month gestational period. In late imperial Chinese medicine, for example, stages of development were recognized, with the foetus becoming recognizably more human as blood turned into flesh, bones and skin. The foetus was thought to develop over ten lunar months, changing from embryonic mud to a child possessing full powers of motion and consciousness (Furth 1995: 168). However, this view of foetal development was profoundly different from Western and Islamic notions of formation and ensoulment. Foetal development in this instance is not a linear progression, but part of a series of life cycles and transformations, as cosmic energy (*qi*) is recycled into an individual. One seventeenth-century Chinese medical text that examined the nature of the foetus concluded:

What is it that congeals at the time of sexual union to make the foetus? ...it is none other than [male] Essence (*jing*) and [female] Blood (*xue*) made up of the material dregs that exist in the temporal world (*houtian*), a tiny bit of pre-existent perfected spirit *qi*...moved to germinate by feelings of desire. (Quoted in Furth 1995: 161)

In this instance, there is no moment of ensoulment or formation: the foetus is made by combining universal material with human essence and blood. Human life may begin here at conception, but a part of this human life also exists beyond and outside this individual foetus. The universal is part of the individual and inseparable from it.

A bio-medical model of gestation becomes even more inappropriate when examining other societies where the development of a foetus occurs across a wider spatial and temporal time-frame. Evidence from the ethnographic record shows that neither conception, birth, nor any point in-between can be viewed as a reliable boundary of when childhood begins or can be used as markers of full personhood. The following two cases have been chosen because they seem to represent very well the relevant points I want to make. An examination of the nature of childhood in these two societies seems to revolve around these central ideas about personhood, demonstrating the complexities of the ways in which children become the possessors of full personhood. The links between foetal growth, infancy, childhood, and gestation, as well as the connections between parents, children, and others in society, both living and dead, are all touched upon in these examples and point to the scope and range that an anthropology of childhood might cover.

### *Spirit Children*

As noted above, it is a fallacy to think that anthropologists showed no interest in childhood or children until fairly recently. Many early anthropologists did write extensively about children and the nature of childhood. One of the most notable was Phyllis Kaberry, whose ethnography of the aboriginal people of the Kimberleys in the 1930s covers childhood in great detail, and who placed beliefs about childhood at the centre of her work. Children in *Aboriginal Women: Sacred and Profane* (1939) are not some separate sub-group of society or of interest because of the processes of education or socialization (although she gives a detailed account of these)—they are of interest because it is through childhood that issues of kinship, social relationships, and religious and spiritual beliefs are best expressed (James 2000). Kaberry focuses in particular on the links between human children and spirit children, of whom she wrote:

These spirit children, *djinganara:ny*, are not ancestors...but were placed in the pools by Kaleru, the rainbow serpent in the...Time Long Past, before there were any natives. Often they are temporarily incarnated in animals, birds, fish, reptiles, but they also wander over the country, play in the pools, and live on a green weed. Descriptions vary; some say the *djinganara:ny* are like little children about the size of a walnut; others, that they resemble small red frogs. Conception occurs when one of these enters a woman. Its presence in the food given to her by her husband makes her vomit, and later he dreams

of it or else of some animal which he associates with it. It enters his wife by the foot and she becomes pregnant. The food which made her ill becomes the...conception totem of her child. Scars, moles or dimples are the wounds where some animal or fish was speared by the man. (Kaberry 1939: 41-2)

Children of eight or nine as a rule knew their [conception totem], and were interested in the fact that they had once been a fish, bird, reptile or animal prior to the entry of the spirit child into the mother. [One child] related to me with pride: 'I bin sit down alonga fish first time. Father bin come close alonga water. He bin spear 'em me. Me bin go alonga camp, me bin go alonga mother; me bin come out alonga bingy' (ibid.: 740). [I was a fish at first. Father came up to the water and speared me there. So I was taken to the camp, and to my mother, and I came out as a baby] (translations by James 2000: 173).

Issues of children and childhood are central to this ethnography, but Kaberry has never been known as an anthropologist of childhood. Yet her work seems to be a prime exemplar of what an anthropology of childhood should be if it is to be a mainstream anthropological concern. There may be little on children as active agents, but children are interviewed and quoted. They are seen as integral to their society and not as some marginalized sub-culture. Their education and socialization are examined, but this is done in the light of wider philosophical and moral beliefs. Most importantly, she begins her ethnography of children before they are born. Children are seen as existing before birth and conception, existing in cosmological time and space. Life and personhood exist in some form a long time before birth. Any model of childhood based only on physical growth and development would severely limit any anthropological study of childhood in this culture.

In this ethnography, since conception and gestation are passages from one world to another, childhood as a state of being has to be studied both before and after birth. Understanding childhood in this context goes far beyond understanding children themselves. It is of central importance to the community that Kaberry studied because it is so directly concerned with the very nature of personhood and existence. Childhood is a continuum between states, not only between infancy and adulthood or puberty, but between life and non-life, between the human and spirit worlds, between cosmological and worldly time. Children are recognized as existing pre-birth, but their exact nature is difficult to ascertain. It would be very problematic to talk of spirit children as either possessing personhood or making claims that they are human, since they are incarnated in the shape of a fish or an animal. Spirit children are potential human lives, but also a form of life itself. As Conklin and Morgan write, their 'personhood is imminent but not assured' (1996: 658).

*Little Corpses: Okopuchi*

Further corroboration can be had by examining the nature of infants in some Amerindian societies in Amazonia, which illustrates an important gap in the anthropology of childhood that needs to be filled. Just as spirit children and the unborn rarely feature in ethnographies of childhood, nor do children who have already been born but not yet socialized or admitted to full personhood. Amazonian ethnography has long been interested in issues of personhood, from couvade practices which reinforce the spiritual bond between parents and child to issues of infanticide and the nature of the new-born. These ideas are well expressed by Rivière in relation to the Trio and the Waiwai:

For the Waiwai the purpose of the couvade is agreed upon, whatever the details of the means of achievement. The soul of the new-born child is weak and not properly fixed in the child. The soul is free to leave the child and wander about with the child's parents; in these wanderings the child's soul is very vulnerable to spiritual danger. Furthermore, because of the close spiritual tie between the child and the parents, a spiritual danger acting on the latter will affect the former; thus the limitations on the diet and activities of the parents....

In Trio cosmology there is a reservoir of soul-matter at the end of the world. The soul of each individual is drawn from this reservoir at birth and returns there on his death. To begin with this soul-matter is not properly fixed in the new-born child, nor has he enough of it to make him an independent being. Indeed the short-lived infant is regarded as someone who has not made a proper and complete entry into the world; he fails to become an individual in his own right. The soul flows into the child by way of the parents, whose duties therefore are not simply concerned with the physical growth and care of the child but also with his spiritual nurturing. Although the father is thought to be as much involved in this as the mother, the Trio represent the mother/child relationship more positively. They depict the existence of a spiritual umbilical cord which is the counterpart of the physical one. The spiritual cord survives long after birth has taken place, and it gradually disappears as the child becomes stronger and more independent. It is through this cord that the soul-matter flows to feed the child.

Although the Waiwai may not represent this spiritual tie and the need for spiritual nurturing in quite such an explicit manner, it seems clear that similar ideas lie behind their couvade practices. Firstly, the Waiwai seem to express some doubt about the nature of the young child's proper being since the term used for such a person is *okopuchi*, which literally means 'little corpse'. After three years the child's soul is thought to have become large and independent enough no longer to follow the parents but to go its own way in the child's body. Presumably, from then on the child is an individual in his own right, being completely formed with his own body and soul (Rivière 1974: 429).

Children in Waiwai society are ambiguous, human but not full persons. The term *okopuchi*, 'little corpse' or 'little not being thing', as Rivière translates the term literally elsewhere (Rivière n.d.), suggests the anomalous nature of childhood, that childhood is a time when children become fully human and change from 'not being things' into 'being things'. It is during infancy and early childhood that children's souls become strong and independent enough to exist on their own, and that children themselves become fully integrated into their society and given personhood. The ambiguous status of children has been looked at by many who study them, but often in terms of whether children's worlds are different from adult ones, whether they are a separate, related, or integral group with respect to adults, and how much independence and agency children can really have when they are constrained by adults. It is recognized, of course, that children are not a homogenous category, and equally that childhood is a temporary one, out of which children will eventually move. What is not so obvious, however, is that pre-birth, birth, and infancy are also stages of childhood that have to be examined in order to provide complete, comprehensive studies of childhood. *Okopuchi* personify these ambiguities in that they represent the unstable nature of childhood and the difficulties of talking about childhood without knowing when childhood in any given society begins, what its status is, and the connections between children and the beginning of life.

### *Conclusion*

When Charlotte Hardman asked the question, 'Can there be an anthropology of childhood?', she argued that such an anthropology was needed, since there were cultures and world-views out there that ethnographers never noticed because these were the cultures and world-views of children. An anthropology of childhood was needed to uncover these cultures and to bring children back into the anthropological fold. While I agree with her unreservedly that there can and should be an anthropology of childhood, I would argue that this is not a new field of study, and that concerns about the nature of childhood and children go back to the birth of anthropology as an academic discipline. Indeed, Victorian anthropologists such as John Lubbock (1978 [1870]) and C. Staniland Wake (1878) saw children and savages as conceptually closely linked and as very similar in nature.

An anthropology of childhood should ideally encompass spirit children and *okopuchi* as well as older children; it should be able to extend its theoretical range to cover children unborn, and even un-conceived, and those who are born but not recognized as full persons. To look at childhood only from birth to adulthood (however that is defined) is to ignore much of the previous anthropological literature that has looked at childhood and children, but from perspectives other than that children are social agents, muted voices, or products of socialization. Un-

doubtedly childhood is of interest to anthropologists for a number of reasons, but I would argue for the broadest possible understanding of childhood and argue that issues such as spirit children and couvade practices are vitally important to an anthropology of childhood.

Exploring childhood can be a way of examining boundaries and differences between foetuses, children, and adults; between the living and dead; and between full social persons and potential persons. It can be a means of talking about the nature of children at all stages in their development, before birth, at birth, and after birth; as part of this world, and also as part of other worlds. All these issues can illuminate childhood studies, making it a dynamic and original part of anthropology. What I have tried to argue for in this paper is the widening out of the field of childhood studies, certainly looking at children's social worlds, interviewing children and reconceptualizing them as active meaning-makers, but also looking at the unstable and problematic nature of childhood, and relating childhood to complementary and wide-ranging anthropological concerns of personhood, kinship, and social organization.

#### REFERENCES

- ARIÈS, P. 1962. *Centuries of Childhood*, New York: Vintage Books.
- CARVEL, J. 2001. 'Nurses Upset over Foetus Disposals', *The Guardian*, 22 May, 2001.
- CONKLIN, B., and L. MORGAN 1996. 'Babies, Bodies, and the Production of Personhood in North America and a Native Amazonian Society', *Ethos*, Vol. XXIV, no. 4, pp. 657-84.
- DUNSTAN, G. R. 1988. 'The Human Embryo in the Western Moral Tradition', in G. R. Dunstan and M. J. Seller (eds.), *The Status of the Human Embryo: Perspectives from Moral Tradition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ENNEW, J. 1986. *Sexual Exploitation of Children*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- EVANS, G., and R. MCLOUGHLIN 2001. 'Children in Their Places', *Anthropology Today*, Vol. XVII, no. 5, pp. 27-8.
- FIRTH, R. 1970. 'Education in Tikopia', in J. Middleton (ed.), *From Child to Adult: Studies in the Anthropology of Education*, New York: The Natural History Press.
- FORTES, M. 1970. 'Social and Psychological Aspects of Education in Taleland', in J. Middleton (ed.), *From Child to Adult: Studies in the Anthropology of Education*, New York: The Natural History Press.
- FURTH, C. 1995. 'From Birth to Birth: The Growing Body in Chinese Medicine', in A. B. Kinney (ed.), *Chinese Views of Childhood*, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press.
- GOW, P. 2001. 'What Piro Children Find Interesting', Paper presented at the Conference 'Children in their Places', Brunel University, London, 21-23 June 2001.
- HARDMAN, C. 1973. 'Can There be an Anthropology of Childhood?', *JASO*, Vol. IV, no. 1, pp. 85-99.

- JAMES, A., and A. PROUT 1995. 'Hierarchy, Boundary and Agency: Toward a Theoretical Perspective on Childhood', *Sociological Studies of Children*, Vol. VII, pp. 77–99.
- . . . 1999. *Constructing and Re-constructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Study of Childhood*, Brighton: Falmer Press.
- JAMES, W. 2000. 'Placing the Unborn: On the Social Recognition of New Life', *Anthropology and Medicine*, Vol. VII, no. 2, pp. 169–89.
- KABERRY, P. 1939. *Aboriginal Women: Sacred and Profane*, Routledge: London.
- LA FONTAINE, J. S. 1986. 'An Anthropological Perspective on Children', in M. Richards and P. Light (eds.), *Children of Social Worlds*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- LEO, J. 2000. 'Time to Draw the Line on Abortion and Infanticide', *Human Life Review*, Vol. XXVI, no. 4, p. 138.
- LUBBOCK, J. 1978 [1870]. *The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- MUSSALLAM, B. 1990. 'The Human Embryo in Arabic Scientific and Religious Thought', in G. R. Dunstan (ed.), *The Human Embryo: Aristotle and the Arabic and European Traditions*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press.
- QVORTRUP, J. 1994. *Childhood Matters: Social Theory Practice and Politics*, Aldershot: Avebury Press.
- PALMER, E. 2001. 'Born-Alive Bill Approved by Committee', *CQ Weekly*, Vol. LIX, no. 30, p. 1858.
- PIAGET, J. 1932. *The Moral Development of the Child*, London: Routledge.
- RIVIÈRE, P. 1974. 'The Couvade: A Problem Reborn', *Man* (n.s.), Vol. IX, no. 3, pp. 423–35.
- . . . n.d. 'Conception, Birth and the Creation of the Person', unpublished ms.
- SHAPER, I. 1927. 'Customs Relating to Twins in South Africa', *Journal of the African Society*, Vol. XXVI, pp. 117–37.
- VYGOTSKY, L. 1962. *Language and Thought*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- WAKE, C. S. 1878. *The Evolution of Morality*, London: Trübner and Co.
- WAKSLER, F. C. 1991. 'Studying Children: Phenomenological Insights', in F. C. Waksler (ed.), *Studying the Social Worlds of Children: Sociological Readings*, London: Falmer Press, pp. 60–9.