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## Like a Banana Tree : Towards a Model of Children in Disasters : An Exploration of an Anthropological Problem

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**LIKE A BANANA TREE:**  
**Towards a Model of Children in Disasters: an Exploration of an**  
**Anthropological Problem**

**By Jennifer Anne Ricarda Marten**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Award of

**Bachelor of Arts (Sociology and Anthropology) Honours**

at the

Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences

School of International, Cultural and Community Studies

(Sociology / Anthropology)

Edith Cowan University

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## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

## **ABSTRACT**

There is currently an emerging literature on the anthropology of disasters, and also an emergent literature on the new anthropology of childhood and children. Despite an extensive search, no significant body of literature on the anthropology of children in natural event based disasters could be found. A central focus of this thesis will be interrogate this gap through a documentary search, to ascertain what factors might influence the absence of children in the anthropology of disasters. To achieve this, the study defines and conceptualizes both the anthropology of disasters and the anthropology of children. Recent research shows that children are not simply passive receivers of culture, but are active social actors in the construction of a sense of self, place and community. The thesis will examine the discourses of disaster containing children and argue that children are securely enclosed in the medicalized narratives of psychology and psychiatry. The purpose of the study will be to suggest ways in which the separate discourses may engage in dialogue, and to generate research questions on how an anthropology of children in disasters might be perceived. The thesis will propose that children can be a positive resource in disaster preparedness, mitigation and response, and it is hoped that this field of research will impact on future disaster policy and practice.

*I certify that this thesis does not to the best of my knowledge and belief:*

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;*
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or*
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Signature

Date

22nd May 2002

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## ***INTRODUCTION: Project Background and Outline, Chapter Overview.***

### ***Project background and outline***

This project began as an inquiry into the place of children in the reconstruction and recovery of communities following disasters caused by natural hazards and events, in particular, earthquakes. The impetus for the investigation came from two visits to Turkey, the first of four weeks duration in June 2000 as a member of an ECU archaeological survey team, and the second of five weeks in January 2001. On both visits I found myself deeply engaged with contemporary anthropological issues, especially the ways in which Turkish children were negotiating and constructing their life-worlds in a rapidly changing and globalising environment, while grounded in a past encompassing civilizations of great antiquity, a past in which natural events such as earthquakes were historically embedded.

During the second visit, I travelled to several of the 1999 earthquake zones in the north of Turkey, and was able to observe at first hand some of the reconstruction and recovery programmes eighteen months on. It was also where a project officer remarked to me, “we never see any anthropologists after earthquakes”. Here, in the ‘prefabrik towns’ such as Yenikoy (New Village), thousands of families were spending their second winter in temporary housing. These are mostly uninsulated demountables, set in endless rows, along treeless roads, where the areas set aside for children’s play were freezing and muddy in the winter, dusty and hot in the summer. Yet, the children I met in Izmit and Golcuk impressed me with their acute

consciousness of the situation, their strength of purpose, their resilience and determination to weave a new fabric from the strands left from before the earthquake; family, friends, school, work, and play. Children of all ages revealed an impressive sense of agency and autonomy in the ways they were re-constructing and re-creating their sense of self and community following such a major fracturing of their lives. In a Bourdieuan sense, social capital was in plentiful supply.

Returning to Australia, I intended to explore the place of children in the anthropology of disasters, and research the ways children construct and re-construct their lifeworlds following major loss. However, an extensive literature search revealed that while there was an emerging discourse on the anthropology of disasters (Oliver Smith & Hoffman, 1999), no body of research could be found on the place of children in this new field. Where were the children, where were their voices, or even the voices of those speaking for them? This search led to finding a second emerging discourse, this time on the re-construction and interpretation of children and childhoods in anthropology and sociology (Prout & James, 1997, Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1992, Corsaro, 1997, Toren, 1993). A small but growing body of literature existed on the anthropology and sociology of children in war and other conflict situations and emergencies (Burman, 1994, Boyden, 2000, Scheper-Hughes & Sargent, 1998), but on the place of children in the anthropology of natural hazard or technological based disaster, almost nothing was located.

A large body of literature on children in natural and disasters was found to exist, but was firmly grounded and enclosed in the domains of psychology, psychiatry, trauma and social work. The medicalization narrative of children in disasters will

therefore be a major investigative component of this study. The gaps and interstices of social interaction are core focal points of anthropological analysis. Such gaps may be located and defined by their borders. The central focus of this project will be to interrogate this particular gap in the literature of children in the anthropology of disasters. I will try to show, through an analysis of the bounded discourses which surround the space, why and where the space exists, and some ways it might be bridged in order to reveal what shape a model of children in the anthropology of disasters might assume.

### *Chapter overview*

In Chapter One I will briefly overview and situate the present day study of disasters in its historical context. This entails an examination of the changing paradigm surrounding the ways disasters are defined. The past three decades have seen social scientists casting a fresh and critical eye over the dominating paradigm which had located most research into 'natural' disasters firmly in the sphere of the physical sciences and engineering, hydro-geophysical processes and technology.

Anthropologists, sociologists and geographers began to ask searching questions about the naturalness of 'natural' disasters in the 1970s, about events which formerly would have been explained as an 'act of God', but were now revealed to be a far more complex social process, at the interface of natural hazards and events, technology and human society.

In the second part of the chapter, I examine the emerging literature on the anthropology of disaster. The theoretical and methodological relevance of

anthropology in disaster research is very evident in its multi-sited, multi-cultural discourse, and particularly in its signature methodology, ethnographic fieldwork. The recent anthology *The Angry Earth* (1999) represents one of the first compilations to appear in the field. The editors, Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna Hoffman, propose four interrelated and multidisciplinary lines of anthropological research; firstly, the archaeological and historical dimensions of chronic disaster embeddedness; secondly, the place of political ecology in disasters, which investigates the interface of society and the environment; thirdly, the sociocultural interpretations of risk and vulnerability, disaster response, social change, community and sense of place, and loss stories; and fourthly, applied, practice and policy perspectives. The chapter will examine examples of these research strands to indicate how well positioned anthropology is to analyse individual and community disruption, loss and change.

In Chapter Two I will focus on the place of children in the current literature of disasters. In the first section I will examine how historically embedded patterns of dealing with children in disasters have modeled current attitudes and perceptions. The chapter will also look at the ways the media variously represent children in disasters, focusing on how western discourses of childhood have failed to include the diversity and complexity of cultural perspectives of children and childhood. I will then turn to the gendered terrain of disasters, and look at the place of women in disasters, as I believe the process of excluding women's voices and stories in disaster research is crucial to understanding how children as a group have been similarly muted and overlooked. Lastly, the second half of the chapter looks in some detail at the discourse where children in disasters have been most securely quarantined, that is, within

medicalization narratives, and the implications of this enclosure for anthropology are explored.

In Chapter Three, I turn to an analysis of the newly emerging paradigm of the construction and re-construction of childhood and children in anthropology and sociology. This entails examining the dominant and still dominating discourse, that has, until the past two decades, constructed and legitimised children as natural, irrational, presocial and incompetent. I believe it is no coincidence that many western understandings of children and childhood have been enclosed in the same psychologized and medicalized narratives as children in disasters. The new sociology and anthropology of childhood looks to a re-construction of childhood as a social process, in which children are viewed as active social agents, with different, but equally valid social capacities and competencies as adults.

Finally, Chapter Four will draw together the various strands of the project, and offer some perspectives for future research, which might lead towards a model of an anthropology of children in disasters. For children to be accepted as competent and active social agents in the realms of disaster and anthropology, anthropologists need to engage with a number of issues. For instance, anthropology urgently needs ethnographies of children in disaster situations. It needs to interrogate the enclosure of children in the medicalized narratives, and to work within the new paradigm of childhood, but alongside teachers, aid workers and trauma psychologists, many of whom still operate within earlier childhood paradigms of developmentalism. I also believe that fruitful research would be forthcoming by looking at the implications of Bourdieu's work on social capital, regarding how children recreate a sense of place,

self and community following disasters. There is also need to combine with emerging research on the anthropology of place. I conclude by indicating how well placed anthropology is to look at the lives of children in disasters, and the ways they contribute to the whole community of meaning, in their work, their play, in their diverse capacities and competencies, and I stress the need for urgent research in the field.

Let me finish with a Mozambican story, which embodies the spirit of what I will be attempting to show, a story about seeing children as independent and strong survivors, very different from some of the images constructed in many western based discourses on childhood and children:

A child is like a banana tree...once you plant one they will reproduce themselves, after five or six years they will grow alone- independent of their parents. Children are the same, after some years they are independent and can grow on their own. They are survivors, like the banana trees; if there is a forest fire and you go away, when you come back you can find a lot of trees burnt, but the banana trees are often alive. Their parents may be dead but they will survive, alone. (Gibbs, 1994, p.271).

## ***CHAPTER ONE: Defining ‘Disasters’, and the Anthropology of Disasters***

### ***Defining Disasters***

Disaster defining today is a contested site, with many voices from a wide range of disciplines engaged in debate and discussion. The principal paradigm shift has been in the re-conceptualization of disasters as complex *social* phenomena, rather than *natural* processes. Since the 1970s social scientists have questioned the received wisdom of natural disasters as being caused by natural forces, and the study of disasters retained within the spheres of the physical sciences and engineering. Instead, sociologists, anthropologists and geographers have increasingly interpreted natural event based disasters as occurring at a complex interface of environmental, technical and social planes.

Retaining the term ‘natural’ in disasters is now often interpreted ideologically, as a strategy for deflecting political responsibility for the vulnerability of populations in hazardous environments, and the social consequences of disasters (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 1999, Varley, 1994). Disaster research is now moving well beyond the earlier parameters of disasters being sudden, unexpected, un-prepared for, and abnormal. Instead, new sites are being explored, and new understandings are being constructed which reveal disasters as diverse and complex social processes. For instance, historical and archaeological research has been able to illuminate the

significance of temporal dimensions of disasters. Knowledge of disasters is now understood to be a chronic, culturally embedded knowledge in many cultures. The long wave, sequential, cyclic and social nature of disasters has led to many traditional coping strategies in disaster preparedness, and to the development of indigenous technologies in disaster response and mitigation. The task of uncovering such strategies and technologies is now finding its way into anthropological and cultural geography research (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 1999, Lavell, 1994, Haque & Zaman, 1994).

World history abounds with accounts of natural events resulting in human disasters, but the study of disasters for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with few exceptions<sup>1</sup>, has been located within the technological and scientific domains, focusing on physical causes and effects, impacts, management, relief and reconstruction (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 1999, Hewitt, 1983). However, in the 1970s a number of researchers from the social sciences, mainly cultural geographers, sociologists and anthropologists, began to challenge the prevailing paradigm. This discourse constructed disasters as being extreme, cataclysmic, hydro-geophysical events affecting populations, culturally ascribed to God or Nature, caused by forces extraneous to human society, out of human control, and for which people were neither responsible, nor accountable (Hewitt 1983, Alexander, 1993, Varley, 1994).

The central challenge to this 'hazard paradigm' (Hewitt, 1983, pp.10-13), began in the 1970s, and involved relocating the science based perception of hazards and disasters as arising from the impact of the *environment on humans*, to the reverse view, in

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<sup>1</sup> Prince's (1920) study of the social impact of the munitions boat explosion in Halifax harbour.



which the impact of *humans on the environment* became the principal cause of disasters. Despite a large body of literature now available on the sociology of disasters, it will become clear in this thesis that the dominant paradigm is a persistent one, especially in the field of trauma psychology, where 'natural' disasters are still ascribed to "cruel acts of nature" (Saylor, 1993, p.3) or defined as "caused by the forces of nature, rather than by the actions or products of humans", (Belter & Shannon, 1993, p.85)

According to Red Crescent and Red Cross 2001 statistics, in the decade 1990 – 2000, more than 75,000 children, women and men were reported killed each year in disasters, and on average 211 million people are annually affected by disaster, seven times more than the average number of people killed or affected in conflict situations. In natural event based disasters, an average of 1300 people died weekly over the past decade and ninety eight percent of those victims and survivors were located in low or medium development countries. In 2000, the number affected by disasters rose to 256 million (Red Cross & Red Crescent, 2001).

If it seems from media reports that numbers of disasters are increasing, particularly in the hydro-meteorological field (floods, droughts and severe windstorms), borne out by statistical data, evidence also reveals a major imbalance in the numbers affected by disasters between highly developed western industrialized nations and low development countries. On average, in highly developed countries, 22 people per disaster are killed, 145 people in medium development countries, and in low development countries, over 1000 (Red Cross & Red Crescent, 2001).

What are we to make of these statistics? How are the various discourses of disaster constructed? How do we clarify some of these terms? Bankoff, (2001) distinguishes between 'hazard' and 'disaster', and provides a useful hazard typology:

a *hazard* is an extreme geophysical event, or the potentially dangerous product of some human activity; a *disaster* is the effect of the former upon human societies, to cause immiseration, morbidity or death. Increasingly [there is] a graduated typology of four categories: *geophysical hazards* or earthquakes, landslides, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions; *climatic hazards* or droughts, floods, hurricanes, torrential rain, wind and hail storms; *biological hazards* or crop disease, epidemics, epizootics and locusts; and *social hazards* or insurrection, repression, large fires, collapsing political structures, and warfare (p.31n.).

How are the discourses of disaster constructed? Before examining the major focus of present day social research in disasters, *vulnerability*, it might be useful to step back and review what amounts to a turning point in the study of disasters. In 1983 Hewitt edited the first major critique of the scientific/technological paradigm of disasters, in the compilation *Interpretations of Calamity*. In his introductory essay, Hewitt carefully and thoroughly explores the construction of the dominating paradigm. Using Weberian and Foucauldian theory, he describes how the excessively narrow focus on 'the hazard' as a 'natural' occurrence, and an overemphasis on separating the crisis and loss of disasters, from on-going life, has led to a significant neglect of the socially constructed component of hazards (1983, p.8). He suggests that institutions involved in hazard and disaster research have channeled their human and material resources into very particular work styles and practices, resulting in a scientific and technocentric version of Weber's bureaucratic 'iron cage'. The lack of social perspective in disaster research, Hewitt argues, has led to a view held by its practitioners that is 'peculiarly archaic and inflexible' (1983, p.9)

Hewitt proceeds to examine the language of the hazard paradigm from a Foucauldian perspective, showing how the language of disaster research is used to construct a sense of 'otherness' and 'discontinuity' (1983, p.10). Essentially, it is a lack of order and control Hewitt perceives as the crux of the dominant discourse. For example, there is its wide use of 'un' words as descriptors, "disasters are *un*managed phenomena. They are the *un*expected and *un*precedented. They...are highly *un*certain. *Un*awareness and *un*readiness are said to typify the condition of their human victims....in North America they are *un*scheduled events" (1983, p.10). Here Hewitt is moving towards Foucault's notion of the *archipelago* of practice, with hazards and disasters constructed as discrete and separate from other human interactions with the biosphere. Often the first response of the state is to quarantine and enclose the disaster 'zone', deploying military and official expertise, isolating and excluding the islands of disaster from everyday life (1983, p.12). This construction of disasters as "a localized disorganization of space...[a] rupture in the fabric of productive and orderly human relations with the [natural] habitat" (1983, p.13) has left Hewitt with a deep sense of unease. Many of these practices he attributes to the territoriality of hazard researchers, whose desire to partition and classify the various fields of hazard and disaster research leaves no room for open ended philosophical debate. Hewitt looks to the Foucauldian notion of *monologue* to describe these practices of closing systems off to dialogue, and, as I will show later, this fairly accurately describes the practices by which children in disasters have been enclosed within a medicalized discourse. Of particular significance to anthropologists and geographers, Hewitt argues, is the almost total indifference of the dominant paradigm to the historical perspectives of disasters and to cultural diversity, resulting in an essentialized and homogeneous discourse "whereby

disaster is appropriated and severed from its roots in the rest of material life" (1983, p.29).

Hewitt was writing in 1983, and it might be supposed that in the intervening eighteen years much would have changed, and to be sure, there is now much more awareness of the complexity of the nature of disasters. Universities offer interdisciplinary studies on hazards and disasters, which incorporate the physical and social sciences, and journals such as *Disasters* provide a regular forum for academics, policymakers and practitioners on all aspects of disaster studies. However, just this year the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, in their annual report on disasters, rather acidly commented that

natural disasters are often considered unavoidable and stuffed into the 'act of God' pigeonhole...so 'natural' can be a misleading description for disasters such as droughts, floods and cyclones which affect much of the developing world. Recognizing these disasters as...unnatural, identifying the many human made root causes and advocating structural and political changes to combat them, is long overdue (2001, p.12).

Removing the 'natural' from 'natural disasters' has become the central to a growing body of disaster research which prefers the key approach of *vulnerability analysis* in connection with natural hazards. Bankoff, (2001), in a recent paper, *Rendering the World Unsafe: Vulnerability as Western Discourse*, examines the concept of a society's vulnerability to hazard, making the point that vulnerability is much more complex than a particular geographic or climatic predisposition to natural hazard. Vulnerable populations are those, he says:

most at risk, not simply because they are exposed to hazard, but as a result of a marginality that makes of their life a 'permanent emergency'. This marginality, in turn, is determined by the combination of a set of variables such as class, gender, age,

ethnicity and disability, that affects people's entitlement and empowerment (Bankoff, 2001, p.25).

Thus, single or aged women with children, from the poorest classes and/or excluded ethnic or religious groups may be among the most vulnerable groups in disasters.

Among social scientists there is increasing consensus that while a natural event such as an earthquake, flood, or hurricane can be defined as a natural hazard, a hazard does not become a disaster until it impacts on a vulnerable population (Cannon, 1994, Bankoff, 2001).

The root causes of such vulnerability are listed by the Red Cross and Red Crescent (2001, p.13) as third world debt, global economic restructuring, climate change and global warming, poverty, political indifference and inequitable resources distribution. What Bankoff refers to as the *new geography* has defined vulnerable populations as ones inhabiting defenseless spaces, with particular patterns of frailties, lacking protection, spaces of vulnerability and regions of misrule; where populations are rendered more vulnerable by illegitimate government, disenfranchisement and disempowerment. Such marginalised and vulnerable communities are exposed to increasing land and water shortages, economic deprivation, and political instability, and often forced to move to even more hazardous sites, where they become enmeshed in a poverty cycle that leaves those least able to deal with disasters, in the most vulnerable positions (Bankoff, 2001, p.26).

However, as Bankoff goes on to point out, the conventional paradigm of disasters as being extreme natural events, requiring primarily technocentric solutions such as the dissemination and transfer of technical and scientific knowledge, is proving

surprisingly stubborn, and remains firmly embedded within the policies of the United Nations and funding institutions like the World Bank (2001, pp.24-26). Bankoff goes further in his analysis, linking the dominant paradigm, and the concept of vulnerability, both as parts of an essentially one dimensional western discourse that constructs large areas of the globe as “dangerous, disease ridden, poverty stricken and disaster prone” (2001, p.29). The solution to which, lies of course, in the same western discourse; “ [in] western medicine, investment, preventative systems [and] expertise” (2001, p.29). What is required, Bankoff argues, is that we go beyond vulnerability studies, and investigate the importance of hazards in historically and actively shaping local cultures. In social groups where hazards are chronic, he proposes local cultures have already developed a *culture of disaster*. This involves a permanent accommodation within the interpretive framework of cultural understanding; a “normalization of threat”(Bankoff, 2001, p.30). Many cultures demonstrate specific adaptations to recurrent hazards, that are transmitted, as Oliver-Smith (1999), shows, as adaptive strategies and indigenous technologies for coping with uncertainties.

I agree with Bankoff's concluding hope for a more open ended and discursive forum in the ways we construct the discourses of disaster, which might break away from many of the conceptual restraints still embedded in the research and practice. However, I think it should be noted that the relations of power, that lie behind these discourses, provide ample scope for anthropological research.

***Anthropological Perspectives of Disasters***

Anthropology is well placed to contribute to disaster studies. Its foundational methodology, participant observation and ethnographic fieldwork in a variety of cultural settings, especially in the developing world, provides a good basis for unpacking the various disaster discourses. Disasters, after all, present a special dimension where social structures and processes are undergoing massive and often rapid change. Here, at the interface of the social, technological and environmental, the anthropologist is able to connect with the multiple ways in which people create meaning, identity, sense of place and community (Oliver Smith, 1999, p.4, Hoffman, 1999a).

The relationships between human and natural systems are the ground where disasters are rooted, and their influence on each other provides the potential for both prediction and mitigation of disasters (Oliver Smith, 1999, p.31). Human society and the environment are presently entering a new sphere of global complexity, and we are consequently witnessing an increase in hazards and disasters resulting from the interaction of transnational social, technical and bio spheres. The agents and catalysts of disasters may be located on one side of the globe, but the results and responses may be local, as in the AIDS epidemic. The scope for useful anthropology is therefore enormous.

### ***Anthropological Research Approaches to Disasters***

Anthropological perspectives encompass both the proximate and ultimate causes of disasters and their effects. Oliver Smith and Hoffman (1999) have identified four main approaches in anthropological research; historical and archaeological, political ecology, socio-cultural and behavioural, and applied and practical.

### ***Historical and Archaeological Approach***

In many cultures, the concept of hazard and risk is deeply embedded. Preparation, adaptation and mitigation are ancient stories, from Noah's Flood or Pharaoh's dream of seven fat cows and lean cows, to Indigenous Australian strategies of rangeland burning for the reduction of fire hazards. Western colonial societies often ignored such indigenous knowledge, to their cost and others, resulting in both chronic and acute cataclysmic disasters through unsustainable relationships with the biosphere. Australia, with problems now ranging from salinization to floods and bushfires is a good example.

Oliver-Smith examines the historical perspectives of disaster causation in the catastrophic Peruvian earthquake of 1970, known locally as the "five hundred year quake" because, while the proximate cause of disaster was the natural event of 1970, the ultimate cause began five hundred years earlier with Spanish invasion and colonization (1999, pp.74-88). In this paper, Oliver-Smith explores Pre-Columbian social adaptation to the sensitive ecological balance of the Andean region, a highly hazard-prone area, combining climatological and geological and tectonic hazards. The



Andes have been a locus of human habitation for over ten thousand years, and of complex socio-cultural activities for four thousand years, where, despite the high incidence of natural hazards, human and domestic animal society flourished.

Oliver Smith attributes this successful adaptation to five main features: control of ecological tiers; dispersed settlement patterns; environmentally appropriate buildings, materials and technologies; preparedness for disasters, especially earthquakes; and ideologically and religious based modes of explanation (1999, p.77). The control of multiple ecological tiers encompassed terrains from the coast to the highlands, which spread both resources and risk across a number of regions. Settlement was evenly distributed across ridge and valley, with no urban concentrations, and involved maximum settlement groupings of only around one hundred families. Architecture and building techniques were adapted to seismic and climatic hazards. Stone walls were bonded, and long verticals minimized damage. The universal use of thatched roofs was particularly significant in reducing the potential for injury. The Andean civilizations maintained a sophisticated system of surplus food storage for emergencies and Andean mythology and cosmology incorporated tectonic phenomena. *Pachacuti*, or 'world moment' meant a reversal of the present world, signifying a cataclysmic moment. It was the word used to describe the four ages of the world, major catastrophes, and not surprisingly, the Spanish invasion.

The Spanish conquest of the early 1500s was a disaster of far greater proportions than any previous natural event. In Peru, the first century of Spanish conquest saw the loss of over ninety percent of the population (from nine million to six hundred thousand) and the destruction of most indigenous ecological adaptations. The Spanish settled in

areas known to be hazardous and forced the remaining Andeans into concentrated settlements for political control. Indigenous building techniques were largely abandoned, and the Spanish terracotta tile roof replaced the traditional thatch, resulting in much greater loss of life in disaster events. Storehouses were abandoned as Spanish exploitation of resources removed any possibility of storing surpluses.

Overall, the five hundred years since the conquest witnessed the loss of traditional knowledge, the destruction of access to resources and a devaluation of settlement patterns leaving the Indigenous population marginalized and vulnerable. With the Peruvian economy currently geared to foreign cash crops and inequitable resource distribution, the earthquake of 1970 was indeed a major catastrophe hundreds of years in the making.

Oliver-Smith's paper is a useful example of how anthropology can make both the archaeological and the historical record work to uncover the long view of disasters and the traditional cultural specific adaptations, which though often suppressed and subverted, can often be revitalized as a component of current mitigation and vulnerability reduction (1999, p.77).

### ***Political Ecology Approach***

In another emerging field, that of political ecology, anthropology is able to examine disasters by reviewing ways in which the natural environment becomes politicized through the intersection of ecological, social, economic and political processes. The political ecology approach to disasters unravels and examines the relationships that form between human communities and the biosphere. As we have seen, vulnerability

to disaster occurs when socially constructed adaptive systems to naturally occurring hazards begin to fail. Disaster occurs when social, economic and political systems interact with natural hazards and communities at a particular level of vulnerability, beyond which adaptive and protective systems fail.

In the anthropology of disaster, a political ecology approach focuses on the complex web of process and phenomena from which disasters emerge, often long in the growing, and on how socio-cultural patterns and relations within the ecological framework create conditions for disasters and 'cultures of disaster' (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 1999, pp. 5-6, Bankoff, 2001).

Complex societies are controlled by power elites with contesting interests who produce socially differentiated populations, privileging some and marginalizing and excluding others, securing the former and placing the excluded at varying levels of systemic risk (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 1999, Bryant and Bailey, 1997). Lavell (1994) demonstrates the ways power relations are involved, in his paper, *Prevention and Mitigation of Disasters in Central America: Vulnerability to Disasters at the Local Level*.

This study of economic, social and environmental aspects of vulnerability in one of the most disaster prone regions of the globe, shows the power of the ruling elites to secure economic resources. Multi-million dollar investments for flood mitigation were accessed by the banana industry and multinational corporations in the rich lower river valleys of Costa Rica, leaving most smaller and poorer communities unprotected. Another example relates to the rapid and uncontrolled urbanization of slopes and

hillsides by wealthy developers, which dramatically changes the environmental balance, greatly increasing the risk of mudslides and flooding affecting the urban poor living at the foot of the slopes.

Anthropology and political ecology have been crossing boundaries since the 1960s when cultural ecology investigated the relationships between cultural patterns, land use systems, and human and environmental interactions. From early anthropological research within closed socio-ecological systems, the field has expanded into a broader examination of politico-economic processes, seeking to identify unequal power relations relating to the politicization of social and environmental terrains.

A useful insight into the ways anthropology can contribute to disaster research through the political ecology approach is found in Lansing's (1995) analysis of Balinese water culture. Following conflict between local rice farmers and development agents, after the introduction of new high yielding rice varieties and multi-cropping techniques, his ethnography demonstrated the crucial ecological role of water temples. Lansing's work uncovered the significance of the water temples as a complex adaptive system of interdependence between ecology and human society which dramatic changes to traditional rice growing methods in the Green Revolution of the 1970s had upset.

Lansing, in collaboration with ecologist, James Kremer revealed how the networks of the water temples functioned as a centuries-old sustainable livelihood system based on adaptive cooperation by local farmers, from the mountains to the coast. Moreover,

Intense cooperative effort between the farmers and the anthropological team eventually convinced the development planners that high-technology solutions were counter productive and that their continued imposition would lead to disaster (Lansing, 1995, pp.90-101).

### ***Socio-Cultural Responses Approach***

In this approach, anthropology analyses the ways humans respond culturally and socially to disasters. This avenue incorporates how people construct their sense of community, of place, of self, and how, when these social constructions and creations fail, are threatened or collapse, they respond and reconstruct their sense of being. This field also looks at the different cultural interpretations of hazard assessment, preparedness, response behaviour, and how cultural structures shape explanation, blame, and post disaster recovery and change.

#### ***1. Cultural Interpretations of Risk and Disaster***

Risk and subsidiary fields like risk management have now become mainstream discourse. Sociologist Ulrich Beck (1992), has examined ways in which the culture of risk has filtered and diffused across many strands of thought in Western industrialized societies. He defines risk as “the probabilities of physical harm, due to given technological or other processes” (Beck, 1992, p. 4) and closely identifies western ideas of risk with industrialism and late modernity. The anthropological approaches to risk and risk management look at how both individuals and particular cultures assess, calculate and adapt to risk, asking questions about the construction of risk perception, incorporating social, environmental and cosmological ideologies. Thus, Oliver-Smith

and Hoffman (1999) suggest the contrasting views and conflicts that emerge between local and outside experts, or between environmentalists and developers, are subjects for anthropological study.

Bolin and Stanford (1999, p.89-112) in their examination of the Northridge earthquake in California in 1994, as an example of First World vulnerability, found the majority of factors comprising vulnerability in western, industrialized countries were consistent with developing world vulnerability. These factors included class, gender, religion, race, ethnicity, age, and poverty. The most persistently vulnerable people were found in many historically disadvantaged and excluded groups. However, social policies, such as state generated protection plans had a major effect in assisting disaster mitigation in developed countries.

## *2. Disaster Behaviour and Response*

Behaviour and response in disasters is a key research focus of anthropology, from immediate event to recovery. How cultures respond and how global similarities are perceived and understood are currently being explored by anthropologists. Survivors undergo the breaking of the everyday flow of living and must find shelter, food and water. Often this is a time of stripping aside cultural and social accretions, and a moving away from individual and family networks to create new bonds with strangers. Anthropologists examine issues of exchange and reciprocity, explanation, meaning and blame, local cultural knowledge and adaptive strategies.

Disasters involve a deep sense of loss of place, community, time and self. Often, physical necessities and real day and night problems must coexist side by side with

grief and its rituals. Hoffman (1999a, 1999b, p.134) explores many of these issues in her analysis of the Oakland firestorm in California in 1991. She proposes a model of cultural response to disaster based in part on her own experiences as a survivor of the firestorm. The model she develops, she believes is cross-cultural and applicable universally to the dimensions experienced from crisis to recovery, including emotional, psychological, social and spiritual ones. Although not explicitly using the concept it becomes apparent that what surfaced in the Oakland disaster was a heightened level of social capital and reciprocity. What astonished her, was the emergence, in the aftermath of the disaster, of traditional gender labour divisions, in a highly developed and egalitarian community (Hoffman, 1999, p.177).

### *3. Post Disaster Social and Cultural Change*

For anthropologists as for other social scientists, disasters often reveal the armature of societies and cultures. Disasters impact on all spheres of the anthropological enterprise; in religious rites and ritual, political and economic life, kinship and social networks, and on the management of ecological systems.

One of the earliest anthropological studies of social change coming from disasters was Raymond Firth's (1959) "Social Change in Tikopia", made long after his initial fieldwork in 1929. ). Arriving in Tikopia after a major hurricane, his observations provide an often forgotten model for anthropological fieldwork in disaster. From assessing the enormous physical damage to the island, where all the staple coconut, banana and breadfruit crops were lost, but canoes had survived, he turned to cultural issues. An epiphany in understanding the processes of social change was his realization that although access to resources may decline suddenly, due to natural

hazards such as hurricanes, droughts or tsunamis, the outside ideas and knowledge introduced during his earlier visit had remained and penetrated the culture (1959, p.31). As Firth says, “the implications of famine in social terms provides an interesting, if given example, of the strength and weakness of a social system” (p. 57). Firth views testing times such as disasters as an empirical method of testing the resilience and strength of underlying social and cultural systems and structures, and of people and their powers of community organization.

More recently, Dyer (1993) has examined the long-term impact of the Exxon Valdez oil spill on the culture and traditional practices of the Eyak peoples of Alaska. He defines the Eyak peoples as a *natural resource community*, meaning a bounded group, culturally distinct and dependent for their livelihood on access to renewable natural resources. Dyer represents the community as occupying three concentric spheres, an outer sphere of broad culture, a second sphere of tradition, and an inner sphere of core traditions, where resistance to cultural change is most intense. Dyer’s conclusions are based on two years of fieldwork, collecting individual and collective perceptions, narratives and memories that focused on socio-cultural change, including “a loss of subsistence practices, breakdown of sharing networks and disruption of communal control of native resources” (1993, p.83). He concluded that due to the magnitude of the disaster some changes and loss are becoming permanent, and that culture and tradition loss can be perceived as a secondary disaster, especially when technological disasters impact on *natural resource communities*.



#### *4. Applied and Practicing Anthropology in Disaster Research*

Increasingly, anthropologists are directing disaster research towards preparedness, prevention and mitigation processes. As discussed earlier, fieldwork has revealed traditional adaptations and indigenous technologies, that are culturally embedded knowledges of vulnerability reduction and disaster mitigation (Oliver-Smith, 1999). Anthropologists are now working in areas directly involved with disaster studies, and government and non-government aid and relief agencies where they contribute to understandings of how processes of relief are culturally constructed. Ethnicity, gender, age, class and status affect the even distribution of aid to survivors (Oliver-Smith 1999, p.11, Red Cross & Red Crescent 2001). The worth of such work is considerable, as already disrupted and fractured communities can be further affected by high technology relief teams from industrialized countries who ignore local knowledge, kinship structures, traditional groupings and religious values and beliefs.

Reconstruction, displacement, and relocation also offer significant opportunities for anthropological analysis, as resettlement schemes often overlook traditional practices and kinship patterns (Oliver-Smith, 1999). Not least, in the wider field of development studies, anthropological approaches can assist in illuminating the ways hazard and vulnerability are constructed in development planning (Oliver-Smith, 1996).

#### ***Conclusion***

In this chapter, I have examined the various approaches anthropology can take to disasters. All four approaches interconnect and overlap, one leading into the other.

The archaeological and historical enterprise leads from an understanding of chronically embedded views of disaster into the field of political ecology, while the socio-cultural terrain, comprising risk assessment, response and social change moves easily across to applied practice. However, it has also become apparent that a significant absence exists in current research on the anthropology of disasters when it comes to children.

Underlying all these approaches though, is the concern for theoretical development and verification. It is generally received wisdom in anthropology that times of disaster are the closest anthropology comes to observing the armature of social structures, the elemental configuring of cultures, organizations, institutions, rules and rituals, unadorned with recent accretions. However, as Bankoff (2001), Hewitt (1983) and Varley (1994) observed, the discourses of disaster are the discourses of power relations, and perhaps anthropology should be interrogating this received wisdom. Are disasters the closest anthropology comes to observing the elemental social structures and systems? Can anthropologists interrogate established precedents in social theory, and have the opportunity to critique models and patterns of behaviour and norms? Whose voices are we listening to, who is constructing the discourses of development, vulnerability and disaster? If, as Said (cited in Bankoff, 2001, p.29) argues, western expert knowledge is basically a means for perpetuating its cultural hegemony globally, then perhaps anthropologists along with other social scientists, should alter their ways by paying more attention to local knowledge of disasters, local adaptive practices, and culturally embedded understandings of vulnerability and risk.

## **CHAPTER TWO: *The absence of children in anthropological studies of disaster, analyzing the discourses of disaster containing children***

### ***Introduction***

This chapter will focus on developing and exploring the absence of children in the *anthropological* discourse of disaster. My intention in the following discussion is to examine various factors which may account for this gap in the literature, commencing by situating and identifying the discourses which include children. These discourses will include global narratives of disaster and trauma, cultural and gendered terrains, and the historical narratives of children in disaster, which I believe may have a significant impact on how children are viewed in disaster contexts today. Other disaster narratives involve media representations of children in disasters, including the bleak domain of “disaster pornography” which incorporates the commercialization of images of children in disasters (Burman, 1996, p.238). Finally, I will examine the discourse of medicalization where I suggest most children in disaster research today are located. The enclosure of children in these various discourses and narratives rarely incorporates an anthropological perspective, so the question arises, just where are children in anthropological research, and especially in the anthropology of disasters?

### ***Globalising disaster narratives***

Is the response to trauma following disaster and conflict becoming globalised? Joshua Breslau (2000) argues that it is. In an ethnographic study set in Kobe and Los Angeles in 1995, following the major earthquake in Kobe in January of that year, Breslau examined the epistemological foundations of Japanese and U.S. psychiatric concepts and techniques of disaster response, plus the global networks of power relations in which these processes are embedded. Aid follows disasters on a global level, western societies being the major donor nations, and the developing world, the recipients. In response and relief networks, including trauma aid, Breslau argues that questions relating to power relations in disaster response need to be asked. Are survivors in danger of becoming homogenized, essentialized and lacking identity, and are international relief workers bypassing appropriate cultural practices? Breslau for one, believes that particular “at risk” groups, such as women and children, many ethnic groups and minorities, plus the elderly, are often ignored, and their special needs rendered both invisible and muted.

### ***Media representations of children in disasters***

Media representations of children in emergencies and disasters are an exemplar of this power relations interface. In what she terms “the iconography of emergencies” radical psychologist Victoria Burman (1996) proposes that children and the single child become icons of suffering in disaster and conflict, forming a matrix in which a number of dominant and hegemonic discourses converge. Here, suffering children become representatives of the infantilized ‘Other’, representing vulnerable

incompetent populations from developing countries, being rescued by dominant, competent paternalistic western nations.

Burman proposes that media appeals for relief represent the solitary child, or groups of children as passive victims, and contextualize childhood as an homogenous essentialized entity, using the romantic Western model of innocent and vulnerable childhood, which has been “stolen” from these children. Consequently, children as active producers of knowledge or active agents in response and reconstruction are ignored. Media focuses on particular children’s narratives often ignore the underlying social, political and economic causes of conflict and disaster. The vulnerable or suffering child, so often portrayed alone, in a ruined world, becomes objectified, without tradition, culture or history (Burman, 1996).

This objectification is taken further in studies of what has been termed “disaster pornography” (Omar & de Waal, 1993, cited in Burman, 1994, p.246). This might be defined as the fascination with, attraction to, and commercial exploitation of, disaster images, especially of children, which result in the dehumanization and loss of subjectivity of victims and survivors. Alongside this concept is disaster tourism, the nightly television visits from a comfortable space, to disaster zones, where bodies in the street, or the injured in hospitals become identityless extras in the latest disaster movie. If the textual representation of the (usually) male western doctor, filmed attending the injured or sick child of the developing world is deconstructed, a map of cultural imperialist relations emerges between western industrialized and developing countries (Burman, 1996, pp. 246-247). As Bankoff (2001) earlier argued, this encourages a view of vulnerable societies as weak, passive victims, unable to assist

themselves. Finally, although most studies of children in media representations of disaster have come out of psychological disciplines (Beinart, 1992, Myers, 1992, cited in Burman, 1994), it would seem to offer anthropology a fertile area for further research.

### ***Historical narratives of disaster***

"I have no enemies under seven," said Bernard Shaw (cited in Last, 1994, p.192). His words were in response to the remarkable Eglantyne Jebb's work on children in need, on both sides, in the First World War. The idea of placing children's needs first in disaster and conflict, the principle of *children first*, derives from the war narratives of the early twentieth century. Jebb in particular, and her colleagues, founders of Save the Children following the end of the war, were largely responsible for giving voice and space to the condition of children in distress both in Britain and abroad (Last, 1994, pp.193-194).

"The child must be first to receive relief in times of distress" was one of the articles adopted by both the Save the Children International Union in 1923, and the League of Nations in 1924 in its Declaration of the Rights of the Child. It was the creation of what was to become a continuing discourse, the construction of childhood, and children as morally distinct from adulthood and as having priority over other vulnerable groups. Claiming priority for children over adults overrode multiple cultural understandings as well, and, in a manner similar to modern media representations, Jebb used (to good effect, it might be said) the iconic representation of the suffering child, again essentialized, de-historicized and de-culturalized.

For most of the twentieth century, the *child first* principle became embedded in western discourses on disaster. However, in 1990, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, passed over reference to the “first to receive relief”, offering instead, as a way of being inclusive of other cultural worldviews “the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration”. The Convention also sought to determine, for legal reasons, just who is a child, and to incorporate that definition into culturally specific notions of childhood. As a result, the Convention concluded that a child was “every human being below the age of eighteen years, unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (cited in Last, 1994, p.196). The authority and agency of young people, often already conferred in their own cultures, began to be realized.

However, in opposition to its parent institution, UNICEF’s 1990 *State of the World’s Children* (cited in Last, 1994, p.197) returned to the earlier primary discourse, stressing “that the needs of the children...should have a *first claim* on our concerns and capacities” [italics added]. Last (1994) argues this is understandable, both ideologically (for in order to survive, UNICEF institutionally needs to focus on the rights and needs of the child), and as an agency, for it is one of the world’s prime motivators in protecting the interests of children.

Last critiques the UNICEF approach on a number grounds that I find helpful to this project. Firstly, complex issues about children are often over simplified and the heterogeneity of both children and adults is often overlooked. We need to ask, which child, which adult, which resources? By prioritizing children in disaster and conflict,

are we placing solutions in the dominant disaster paradigm, in a technocentric sphere, based on biomedical models of wellbeing and assessable by statistical references? Secondly, the *first principle* skews our understanding of the interactive webs of meaning which are spun between a child and the others in his or her life, by focusing on the child or children as solitary entities. Thirdly, the principle reinforces the dominant paradigm of childhood, with children as passive recipients of information and culture, and obscures seeing the child as an active social agent, with their own micro-histories, capable of constructing their own webs of meaning. This notion underpins the new anthropology and sociology of childhood, which will be explored extensively in the following chapter.

Last also draws on Nancy Scheper-Hughes' work, from *Child Survival* (1987) to *Death Without Weeping* (1992). Scheper-Hughes shreds the UNICEF project in the most scathing terms, "pretty words indeed, but so out of touch with the realities in which most of the world's children...live out of their brief and battered existence that they strike me as meaningless" (Last, 1994, 9. 198). For Scheper-Hughes, the *first principle* is a "donors charter" which fails to address root causes of disasters or provide options for sustainable livelihoods. Children in many cultures are far from being placed first; from the termination of girl fetuses in China's one child policy, to preferential feeding of boy children in India, to the widespread practices of infanticide as a post natal form of birth control in numbers of developing countries, especially in famine times (Last, 1994, pp. 198-199).



In agreement with Last and Scheper-Hughes, I would argue that while many of these practices have been constructed as coming from cultures which have only limited concepts of childhood, according to western ideals, or that cultural norms are fragmenting under economic and social pressures such as globalization, a more complex explanation is required. Western lack of understanding of cultural diversity is perhaps most important, as social constructions of 'childhood' are extraordinarily diverse (Toren, 1993, Friedl, 1997, Prout & James, 1997). Secondly, imposing the dominant Western construction of childhood and children from the donor culture to the recipient culture can be interpreted as a neo-colonial narrative of paternalism. This narrative continues to embed the early historical models of childhood and children in current disaster practices. At present, Last (1994) is one of very few anthropologists writing on children in disasters, and who has found ways to access children outside the narratives of medicalization. I believe there is considerable scope here for continuing research.

### ***Gendered narratives of disaster***

Another emerging discourse on disaster is that of gender. Last (1994) considers this field also to be one where children's voices have been restrained and muted. Although cultural geographers and sociologists are beginning to explore this space, it is not a frontier where many anthropologists have ventured yet. A seminal work in the area of gendered disaster narratives is *The Gendered Terrain of Disaster: through women's eyes* edited by Enarson and Morrow (1998). That problems exist regarding the invisibility of women in disasters has only recently been addressed in sociological research. A recent conference in Florida, *Reaching Women and Children in Disasters*

(2000) uncovered many of these problems. The needs of women in disasters are large, and largely unmet, and even if recognised, their specific needs are often set aside in the tyranny of urgency in disaster responses. In both global and local overviews, structural and cultural conditions place women at high risk in disaster times. Although policies and practices in development projects are now becoming more gender aware in their approaches, this consciousness is rarely noticeable in disaster management practices. Citing Bangladesh as an example, a country which has seen the deaths of over six hundred thousand people from disasters in two decades, disaster evaluations have not been disaggregated, which has made gender and age analysis impossible. Women are often afraid to leave houses in times of disaster without male permission and their close fitting saris make it difficult to climb to safety. The high risk factor experienced by women is also shown in the example of a Bangladeshi father of five daughters and one son, caught in cyclonic floods, who released his daughters one by one so the son might be saved (Fothergill, 1998, p.18, Enarson & Morrow, 1998, p.3).

Aside from risk assessment and vulnerability, gendered disaster research has also revealed that women are a seriously under-utilized human resource in disaster response and recovery at all levels, from familial to national (Enarson & Morrow, 1998, pp.4-8, Hoffman 1999). Women are still recognized, especially in the developing world, as traditional caregivers. Within the domestic sphere they prepare food, provide healthcare, childcare, education, run households and produce a significant proportion of surplus agricultural goods for market (Enarson & Morrow, 1998, p.214). It seems a remarkable irony that it is at the very site of disasters, which often renders social structures and human identities at their most visible, that women

have been until now almost invisible. And if women are still largely an invisible population in disaster, how much more are children?

The problem of women's invisibility is being addressed in a wide range of disciplines, and it is through the sources and methodologies of retrieving women's stories that I think a way lies of retrieving children's narratives. This involves what I call the *Wenceslas syndrome*, deriving from the line in the traditional carol *in his master's steps he trod*. In the disciplines of anthropology and history one of the most rewarding methodologies in uncovering and revealing women's histories and stories has been to return to the work of previous, mostly male historians and anthropologists and to follow their narratives and sources. This methodology has revealed a rich source of material about women. A good example of this procedure is the work of the historian Inga Clendinnen on the pre-Columbian life of the Yutacan women. Dealing with exclusively male and Spanish sources, she nevertheless extracted and pieced together women's ways of life by tracing and following men's narratives (Clendinnen, 1999, Scott, 1988, p. 5).

In anthropology, Henrietta Moore has made significant use of Ardener's theory of "muted groups" in her study of feminism and anthropology (Moore, 1988, pp.3-11). Muted groups, Ardener proposed, are those groups in societies who are seen but not heard, made inarticulate or silenced. Such groups include women, children, ethnic minorities, such as Roma people, and criminals. Ardener argued that these groups although in view, cannot be heard because the masculine hegemony and patriarchal

structure of language and world view prevents the muted group's "model of reality" from being expressed or understood (Moore, 1988, p. 3).

In both history and anthropology it has become evident that to hear women's voices, it is necessary not just to add their narratives on to men's, but to develop theoretical and methodological approaches which challenge the existing narratives and explore the epistemologies of difference. This is a project for which anthropology is amply qualified. I propose that this approach, by which we trace women's micro-historical models of reality, is one that might similarly reveal children's narratives.

The lens of male bias in disaster management and research is evident in the recent emergent literature in gendered studies of disaster. As we have seen, the dominant paradigm in disaster management has a background of being associated with military and paramilitary institutions, science, medicine and engineering, and with highly skilled technical relief agencies. Enarson & Morrow (1998, p.5) suggest that disaster researchers, mostly male, have continued looking through the western cultural lens, and have previously missed much at the interface of gender relations in disasters, overly ascribing increased risk and vulnerability to class and culture, and failing to include gender and age.

However, the 1990s have seen a gradual acceptance of the importance of gender relations in disaster experience. Bolin, Jackson and Crist (1998) examine the growing body of literature on gender inequality, vulnerability and disaster. They critique in

particular, United States research, which they assert has not adequately engaged with gender analysis of social inequality, either on a theoretical or a contextual level (1998, pp. 27-36). This has often resulted in a critical lack of awareness of the dynamics of the gendered terrain of disasters. Bolin, Jackson and Crist see this as a result of the rationalist, functionalist approach of the U.S. disaster research which, as Hewitt (1983) argued earlier, has produced a technocratic, hierarchical, male-dominated orthodoxy in disaster studies.

They make the point, as does Fothergill (1998) in her review of the literature, that a major failing is the continuing focus on gender as a *differential* descriptor, ignoring consistently emerging patterns of *inequality* rather than that of *difference*. This failure across much of western research to interrogate the socio-cultural basis of vulnerability, or to analyse in depth the complex interface of power relations, political ecology, social and economic conditions which produce social inequality, is only now being partially addressed. It is only very recently, that the voices of those who are at highest risk, are impacted most in disasters, yet are most often excluded in disaster research, are finally being heard.

Delica's study (1998, pp. 109-113) of vulnerability and capacity of women and children in the Philippines is a good example of this new level of research. She examines the underlying ideologies, class structure and gender relations of Filipino society, depicting the life worlds of poor women in both "normal" times and in disasters, such as floods, drought or volcanic eruptions. By focusing on the micro-narratives of women and children in disasters and post disaster periods, she manages

in a short but intense study, to show how disadvantaged, marginalized and vulnerable women are. Although dependent on men for access to resources, they are still expected, even in evacuation camps, to provide food, to breastfeed, to provide sexual succour, and to take care of family health and education, even though those services are often suspended. Single women, such as wives whose husbands are away, or widows, face even more uncertain and vulnerable life spaces. They must earn an income as well as caring for the family, plus cope with camps, displacement and eventually have to find new homes. As Delica sums up, “women have even fewer resources and facilities than before the disaster struck – no income, poor shelter, very limited water, few toilets. Yet they are expected to carry out their traditional responsibilities and more” (1998, p.110).

Hers is one of the few studies which looks at children’s particular vulnerabilities from a social rather than a psychological framework. She reveals their loss of space, loss of social networks, how they absorb adult fears and tensions, suffer nutritional deprivation, and cope with demanding life spaces, from standing for hours in food queues, to coping with public sanitation (1998, p.111). This is also one of the rare studies which incorporates resilience and capacities of both women and children in disasters. Delica suggests that the societal changes caused by disaster can open pathways of opportunity and the possibilities of contesting hegemonic power relations. Women can use this time to reorder their lives and secure control over domains not accessible in pre-disaster conditions. Children are also presented as having opportunities to interact in disaster reconstructions, providing an invaluable back up for women and leading to empowerment for both. Delica focuses on practical

solutions for response and recovery, on the opportunities that could be provided through education and organization, which would enable women to negotiate the new social realities presented in post disaster situations.

Delica's work is representative of much research currently being produced in developing countries, which analyses disasters, vulnerability and hazards through critical theoretical approaches often involving a neo Marxist perspective. Bolin, Jackson and Crist (1998, p.36), and Bryant and Bailey (1997, pp.13-15) see the use of critical and conflict theory as part of the reason why much disaster research coming from the developing world is bypassed or dismissed in the U.S. and other western countries. Such research is often seen as confronting and challenging the traditional integrationist functionalist paradigm so prevalent in western disaster studies. Burton (quoted in Bolin, Jackson & Crist, 1998, p. 36) exemplifies this attitude, dismissing developing world disaster research as "being strong on societal critique [but] weak on practical suggestions", a conclusion I find difficult to support, as the evidence to the contrary is strongly indicative of such research embedding practical solutions as part of the enterprise (Enarson & Morrow, 1998, Red Cross & Red Crescent, 2001, Varley, 1994).

Despite the growing consciousness of the gendered terrain of disasters and emerging theoretical and contextual analyses of gendered inequality in disasters, the literature for the most part still only glancingly refers to the role of children in disasters. Children are very much seen as being within the narratives of women, universally constructed as *women AND children*. It is this contextualisation which helps prevent

children's narratives from being heard as coming from competent social agents, from survivors rather than victims. Allowing children's voices to be heard within the discourse of gendered disaster seems yet another field in which anthropological perspectives would provide an holistic social understanding of the role of children in disasters.

### *Medicalized narratives of disaster*

Any analysis looking to situate and identify these discourses of disaster and how they represent and interpret the place of children, must inevitably arrive at the medicalized narratives of disaster. It is here, I contend, that children have been most clearly and totally enclosed, and their experiences of disasters constructed and pathologized within the biomedical paradigm. Overwhelmingly, the body of literature on children in disasters embeds children in this discourse. In this discussion I will interrogate this dominant discourse and analyse how the medicalization of children's narratives may have come about.

Major factors underlying this discourse are the acceptance of dominant western based models of childhood and children as passive recipients of socialization rather than active social agents (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1992). The consequences of applying this model is a universalist and generalist approach, rather than one including cultural specificity. Secondly, the traditional functionalist technocratic paradigm, which still constructs disasters as 'natural', unexpected, and abnormal, is



still the paradigm in which the medical profession places most of its interpretation of disasters (Saylor, 1993, Gordon, Faberow & Maida, 1999).

An extensive literature search in this field has led me to categorize the medicalized narratives of children in disasters into three main strands. Firstly, the largest field is that encompassing psychological and psychiatric studies of children's individual and group disaster responses (Saylor, 1993). Secondly, the field of trauma studies, characterised by the construction and legitimization of post traumatic stress disorder, including the emergence of what has been termed a 'trauma industry' in global disaster response (Breslau, 2000). Thirdly, the social work response to children in disasters, which has resulted in a proliferation of mental health manuals designed to assist professionals lacking disaster experience, particularly focusing on 'how to' return to 'normal life' as soon as possible (Gordon, Faberow & Maida, 1999). These three strands necessarily overlap and intersect in much of the published literature.

As disasters increase in number and intensity across the world, there is an increasingly globalised response by international relief organizations. As well as providing physical aid; food, shelter, clothing and sanitation, the past two decades have seen a growing emphasis on psychological and psychiatric intervention, including the regular use of disaster psychiatry, in the form of 'critical incident' debriefing and treatment of 'post traumatic stress disorder' (PTSD) (Saylor, 1993, Breslau, 2000).

A number of factors inform the field of research concerning the medicalized models of children in disasters. Firstly, as Boyden (1994) indicates, there is an increasing

pathologisation of children's responses to trauma, which coincides with the development and legitimization of PTSD as a universal system of knowledge, and used by the psychological professions as a global model. Secondly, these models provide a base for welfare and bandaid approaches in responding to children, rather than consultative and participatory programs and policies. These approaches have resulted in an interventionist service delivery that neglects social and cultural boundaries (Boyden, 1994). Thirdly, these universalist models are based on a western developmental paradigm of childhood which constructs children as vulnerable, fragile and dependent, embedded in a Romantic model of society based on functionalist understandings of community integration, social equilibrium, and repair of maladjustment (Prout & James, 1997). Fourthly, the medicalized approach seems reluctant to engage with holistic studies of children in disasters that examine social, economic or political analyses. Boyden, (1994, p.256, 1997), suggests this preferential focus on individual case studies, rather than socio-cultural interpretations, may reflect the paradigms of individual developmental psychology from which the profession operates.

Further to these factors, I have assembled a number of descriptors or markers that may be useful in helping to identify and locate medicalization narratives containing children and disasters.

- First, medicalized psy complex narratives generally display a consistent disinclination to engage with the new paradigm of natural event/hazard based disasters, referring instead to 'natural disasters' as being 'caused by the forces of nature, rather than by the actions or products of humans' (Belter & Shannon, 1993, p.85). Similarly, Gordon, Farberow and Maida (1999, p.2) define 'fires,

floods, earthquakes, hurricanes and tornadoes [as] natural events that are unpreventable and often unpredictable'. This approach fails to locate disasters at the interface of the social, technological and the physical, and consequently disregards several decades of research into the complex social phenomena behind disasters.

- Secondly, as Boyden (1994) has noted above, most medicalized narratives rarely conceptualise children's responses to disasters in the broader social framework, often displaying a lack of curiosity about, and understanding of, socio/cultural structures, processes and causation. Bibliographies of research papers in the field seldom include sociological or anthropological references. The inclusion of texts in the field of community psychology is often the total extent of referencing children/disasters in a diverse cultural setting (Gordon, Farberow and Maida, 1999, pp.169-177). Single discrete case studies are often the basis for solutions and treatment, with holistic studies of community diversity and lived experience overlooked. Within the positivist paradigm of so much of the medicalized framework, children and their families are often depersonalised and objectified, for instance:

there apparently is an association between *the child's* adjustment prior to the natural disaster and the extent to which *the child* experiences difficulty coping with the disaster....With regard to assisting *the child* in coping with a natural disaster, *the parent* who is unable to cope effectively may not be as available for effective coping and support for *the child* (Belter & Shannon, 1993, pp.100-101). [italics added].

- Thirdly, most psy complex narratives centre around western based discourses of children and disasters, focusing on children as highly susceptible to trauma; for

instance, 'how is a child to make sense of, or ever recover from, an experience so devastating and widespread that even otherwise reliable adults seem overwhelmed and powerless?' (Saylor, 1993, p.1). The image of children as an homogenous and particularly vulnerable group is also emphasised, as in this description of Bangladeshi children, following the 1991 cyclone, 'the greater vulnerability of children generated an even stronger response for many observers. Children often appear to lack the resources and skills needed to manage the physical and psychological stress that is associated with disaster' (Compas & Epping, 1993, p.11).

- Fourthly, medicalized narratives can be readily identified by their emphasis on individual trauma, and the lone child's response to disaster, often ironically whilst using large scale quantitative survey methods. While locating children in a broad, generic 'community', and often more specifically in 'the family' and/or 'the school', this body of research focuses on positivist methodology and the use of models such as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), debriefing, Children's Depression Inventory (CDI) and State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children (STAIC) to assess levels of post disaster distress in children (Boyden, 1994, p.257, Ronan, 1996).
- Finally, psychological developmental stage theory is almost a universal marker in these narratives, as illustrated by the following, ' in CHEs [complex humanitarian emergencies] well meaning workers often lack specific child health or child development expertise...they may not realise that children move through many different developmental stages and therefore have rapidly changing needs' (Olney,

1999, p 1). Gordon, Farberow and Maida (1999, pp.110-118), using Erikson's epigenetic model of the stages of psychosocial development from infancy to adolescence, argue that when disasters impact in the middle of, or at a transitional stage of development 'there will be regressive behaviors and changes in usual behaviors....with much overlap of symptoms'.

With these markers in mind, I now turn to Breslau's (2000) in depth examination of the ways in which professional knowledge in the psychological and psychiatric discourse is constructed and globalised. Knowing how these systems of knowledge are disseminated through complex networks of practitioners, transcending and ignoring indigenous cultural practices, is crucial to understanding the power relations behind the medicalization of children. He remarks that:

Recent developments in psychological responses to disasters provide an example of how psychological conceptions of experience emanating from these networks are currently spreading transnationally. These developments tie together the levels of scientific medical research, the international power relations in which science is involved, and the production through medical practices of authoritative knowledge about the self. (2000, p.176).

It is principally through the use of two recent technologies of disaster psychiatry, PTSD and Critical Incident Stress Debriefing CISM, or more simply, *debriefing*, that children in disasters have come to be essentialised as the archetypal suffering 'victims', rather than 'survivors'. Post-traumatic stress disorder was first acknowledged as a disorder in the U.S. in 1980, following studies on Vietnam War veterans, which in turn developed from earlier work on 'shell shock'. It has come to provide a symptomatic framework of stress descriptors, and been further developed into a number of assessment scales, including the Reaction Index (RI). The RI is a PTSD scale, modified and revised for children, to determine the level of psychological

trauma and the need for professional intervention (Gordon, Faberow & Maida, 1999, p.142-147). This index and others like it, has been transferred throughout the global psychological community, and become the universal standard upon which assessment of mental health in disasters is based. PTSD symptomatology is constructed as occurring in three categories, re-experiencing the traumatic event, avoidance or suppression of the event memory, and increased arousal symptoms (Breslau, 2000).

Disaster psychologists often describe trauma as being experienced in concentric social circles, radiating from the impact zone and affecting in some measure all who have contact, from survivors, to volunteers, to extended social networks, and finally to the media, which becomes the means of transmitting the disaster trauma nationally and internationally. This model, referred to as the *community of meaning* is widely used to identify and classify the divergent range of individuals and groups impacted by disasters and to categorize participatory activities at different levels (Breslau, 2000, p. 185; Wright & Bartone, 1994, p. 267-282). The question arises, do these models really signify a *community of meaning* in what might be an anthropological sense, or are they simply managerial models?

It has become a convention in the psychological and psychiatric professions to think that prevention of extended psychological effects from trauma requires the earliest possible intervention and application of group psycho-therapy counseling (Breslau, 2000). This primary intervention method is the earlier mentioned Critical Incident Stress Debriefing. Debriefing theory contextualises the period following a disaster as involving a set of stages experienced by the disaster community.

Briefly these stages are known as; the *Heroic Phase*, which is altruistic, resourceful, and lasting up to a week; the *Honeymoon Phase*, characterised by comradeship and hope, lasting up to six months; the *Disillusionment Phase*, marked by disappointment, anger, unmet promises, and a return to an individualistic focus; followed by the final *Reconstruction Phase*, where survivors reassert control over their own lives following the failure of outside help. These last two phases can last a number of years (Breslau, 2000, pp.184-187).

The debriefing process itself is based on these 'stages of disaster' and is constructed through another series of stages, six in all, which are worked through by a small group who have experienced the disaster, plus two trained debriefers. The debriefing stages begin with the *Fact Phase*, a recreation of personal experiences of the disaster, followed by the *Thought Phase*, a reliving of first thoughts and impressions. The *Reaction Phase* is next, which involves examining and reconstructing reactions both physiological and emotional, followed by the *Symptom Phase*, in which survivors directly encounter the effects and stresses caused by disaster. The *Teaching Phase* refers to the role of the debriefers at this stage, who emphasise that the symptoms and effects of post disaster trauma, are what is commonly interpreted as a *normal reaction to an abnormal event* (Breslau, 2000, p. 186), a oft used phrase the literature. Finally, comes the *Re-entry Phase*, which encourages questioning and exploration of all the previous stages. This stage allows for reintegration into the post disaster community, through assuagement of guilt feelings, and the negation of blame through interpretations of the various processes. If participants are unable to reach closure, the process may be repeated a number of times (Gordon, Faberow, & Maida, 1999, p. 119-154, Saylor, 1993, Breslau, 2000).

Breslau's analysis of the debriefing process finds that this method is now universally accepted in post disaster mental health crisis intervention (2000, p.187). His concern, elaborated below, echoes my own on a number of issues, as it is an area in which anthropology and sociology might make a most significant contribution, namely, that both disciplines need to interrogate how the production of such authoritative knowledge has become the dominant ideology in disaster mental health, yet is based on a *normal* reaction. Studies challenging this paradigm are beginning to appear, for instance, Allan Young's *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (1995, cited in Breslau, 2000, pp.188-189), in which he critiques the relationship between event and symptom, demonstrating that these symptoms are found in multiple diagnoses, without any prior traumatic event.

Breslau's concerns centre on debriefing as a depoliticising process, which focuses on acceptance of the consequences of 'natural disaster' as 'natural', and on absolving concerned groups of blame. In this way debriefing becomes a pacifying process which suppresses and defuses political demands for explanation and reparation (Breslau, 2000, p.189). Similar concerns can be raised in the field of children in disaster. Aid workers and social workers in disaster response, whether locally based, or from international aid teams, use emergency manuals based on these technologies and practices understood as institutionally based common sense. For instance, the following quote from a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) manual designed to assist parents to cope in disasters, reveal how generalised, western specific and inappropriate these texts can be;

*Children depend on daily routines: they wake up, eat breakfast, go to school, play with friends. When emergencies or disasters*



interrupt this routine, *children may become anxious....* Include children in recovery activities. Give children chores that are their responsibility. Having a task will help them understand that *everything will be all right* (FEMA, 2001 [on line]; my italics added).

What these universalist models appear to accomplish is an increased surveillance and pacification of children. These crisis intervention practices consistently ignore indigenous coping strategies, promoting instead the model of child vulnerability, and fail to take into account children's capacities and resilience (Boyden, 1994). Further to this argument, much of the research produced has come from disaster studies in the United States and manuals for use by relief teams, as quoted above, are based on white, middle class, nuclear family models which fail to identify children in terms of cultural, class, gender, poverty or ethnic differences.

Examples of the limitations of using such essentialised models are provided in a slightly different setting, but still applicable to disaster situations, in Boyden's (1994) and Gibbs (1994) studies of children in war and conflict related emergencies. Gibbs, working with children in Mozambique, strongly critiques western models of childhood vulnerability, which so characterize the approach to aid, reconstruction and recovery perspectives of relief organisations. The adult world view of the Mozambican community of Milange, where Gibbs spent three months doing fieldwork for Save the Children in 1993, represents children as strong and independent, capable of surviving, even when their parents are lost to them (1994, p.270). Gibbs found that children also saw themselves in these terms, especially in post war reconstruction, quoting thirteen year old Jepa:

The thing I hated most about being in Malawi was that I had no garden. I had nowhere I could go and uproot my own food; but now I have a field and I have filled it with sugar cane and cassava – soon I will be able to taste my own cassava again (p. 271).

Children in this Milange community were valued, not only for their productive work, a traditional value, but for their future potential, in becoming educated. Gibbs concluded that children in this post war-riven situation, neither saw themselves nor were perceived as being in any way passive or vulnerable, but were an essential part of the healing and reconstruction process, actively engaged in the physical activities of daily life (Gibbs, 1994, p. 276).

Boyden (1994) too, critiques the universal use of the western paradigm of childhood and particularly the biomedical model in her examination of humanitarian responses to children in conflict situations. Her findings indicate that many groups are missed by aid workers. These are the invisible and hidden children, spread through a number of countries, who are sick, disabled or caring for those older or younger than themselves, or who are displaced internally or externally, and often living illegally in bordering countries. One example Boyden provides is the revelation in Lima, Peru, of large numbers of children-headed households made up of refugees from conflict areas where the Sendera Luminoso guerrillas and the military were engaged. The older children found livelihoods as street vendors, locking the younger children in for safety during the day. None of these children attended school or accessed social services because they lacked papers and feared being institutionalized. Boyden cites similar situations in Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and Somalia, and points out that in many countries, numerous children live in chronic situations of conflict and repression, including Northern Ireland, South Africa and Columbia (1994, p.258-9). The main

thrust of her argument is that not only are western models of children in crisis intervention inappropriate for children in these situations, but such crisis intervention more often than not prioritizes high profile groups of children such as refugee children in camps and orphans, and overlooks the hidden children in conflict emergencies (1994, p. 264).

These examples, although of children in conflict, rather than natural hazard based disasters, reinforce my argument and that of others (Boyden, 1994, Gibbs, 1994, Breslau, 2000) that crisis intervention following disasters needs to be both culturally specific and appropriate, and to move beyond traditional western conventional models of childhood as passive and vulnerable, to models which acknowledge and incorporate children's productivity, agency and autonomy. In this field there seems much to concern the anthropological perspective, and anthropologists are well positioned to widen their scope, which at present only connects with children in conflict

### ***CHAPTER THREE: The New Anthropology and Sociology of Children***

In the previous chapter we saw that children in current disaster studies are almost wholly situated in psychoanalytical, psychological and social work literature, with few exceptions. This chapter asks where children are placed in anthropological and sociological research today, bearing in mind that an emergent literature on this subject has appeared over the past fifteen years, radically altering previous paradigms of childhood and children in the two disciplines.

Exploring these new paradigms will entail a brief historical overview of the routes by which the two disciplines have reached their present position. While sociology and anthropology have followed different paths, they are both making use of cross disciplinary research in what is termed the *new sociology and anthropology* of the reconstruction of childhood and children. New voices in both disciplines are challenging the traditional orthodoxies, where until recently the dominant paradigm was firmly embedded in child development studies, emanating from psychology and education.

#### ***Historical overview***

In sociology, children were not so much ignored, as marginalised and muted.

Children's lives were seen as being very much in the charge and control of adults as

they passed through various stages of socialization and development, and they were seen to 'belong' to, and in the charge of various groups such as the family and teachers. Studies were very much 'top down' and children's voices were rarely heard, and even if heard, were not deemed to be reliable informants (Corsaro, 1997).

Anthropology followed similar lines, with some notable exceptions. Anthropologists in the first half of the last century collected culturally diverse information on childrearing practices, and the place of 'the child' in kinship structures, initiation and ritual practices in attaining adulthood. These ethnographies were written from an adult centred perspective, and sometimes from a male perspective, until more women anthropologists entered the field (Levine, 1998). This adult centred approach is well illustrated in Hamilton's (1981) otherwise excellent ethnography of child rearing among the Anbarra people of north-central Arnhem Land<sup>2</sup>.

The ongoing debate, which began in the 1960s and 1970s, centers on the question of childhood and children. What is childhood? How is it determined, is it a natural state or a social construction? Who are children? Are they active social agents, living real everyday lives, with desires and needs, producing and creating their own knowledge, interpreting the world as well as learning from it? Or are they in some naturally occurring state, which renders them vulnerable, fragile, *tabula rasa* and dependent, processing through predetermined stages which sees them emerge at the other end of childhood, as rational, competent autonomous adults?

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<sup>2</sup> In this finely grained and rich description of Indigenous family life, detailing children's socialization, there is little room for children's voices to emerge, or for children to be seen as active social agents, as the ethnography retains the objective view of children as recipients of culture, rather than interacting in the social process.

Perhaps one of the most significant challenges to the 'givenness' of childhood came as early as 1962, from the French social historian Philippe Aries. His major survey of children and family life in Europe, from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment, *Centuries of Childhood* centered around the challenge to the universality of childhood, encapsulated in his much quoted observation "in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist" (1962, p.125). This, he explained, did not mean medieval children were not affectionately cared for and nurtured, but that 'childhood' as a state of being, apart from 'adulthood', did not exist in medieval Europe. Instead, children, after infancy, were accepted as miniature adults, and indeed, as members of adult society.

Aries based much of his evidence for these thoughts on the absence of children in medieval art, tracing the appearance of children in western art to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, where childhood was portrayed as a time of fragility and innocence, which he called the 'coddling period' (1962, p.130). Aries argued that the notion of 'childhood' had progressed from being non-existent, via the 'coddling' era, to the 'moralistic' perspective of the Enlightenment, where childhood became a time of training and discipline for future adult duties. He saw this background as providing the foundation for modern theories of child development, with their gaze directed toward psychological stages of competency, through which adulthood was to be conferred (1962, pp.411-415). Aries' work sparked heated debate in history circles and the social sciences, from which a number of evolutionary meta narratives of the family in history emerged, among them de Mause's hugely popular 1974 'psychogenic' theory

of history<sup>3</sup>. In the same year, Richards (cited in Prout & James, 1997, p.2) challenged the prevailing orthodoxy of psychological developmental theory.

Further salvos in the debate opened on several fronts in the 1980s. Richards and Light (1986) and Denzin (1977) (cited in James & Prout, 1997, p. 2), raised the possibilities of an alternative approach to socialization theory. Critiquing the uncritical acceptance of the psychological approach, researchers like Jens Qvortrup (1997,) worked to raise the visibility of children in social statistics and gender studies, while Judith Ennew organized the *Ethnography of Childhood Workshops* at Cambridge in 1986, focussing on the cultural specificity of children's studies.

Countering the meta narratives of Aries and de Mause, a number of strong critiques were forthcoming, notably Hanawalt (1993), Pollock (1983), Shahar (1990) (cited in Corsaro, 1997, pp.51-57). Pollock's *Forgotten Children* is perhaps the best known, with her analysis of hundreds of primary sources resulting in a much more comprehensive and complex understanding of children's histories in western societies (Corsaro, 1997, pp.50-56). The ultimate gain, it might be said, from Aries' and de Mause's sweeping statements and grand stage theories, has been the subsequent production of many carefully constructed micro-narratives which illuminate past childhoods. We now know from these works that children have been continuously cared for, valued, and highly regarded in Europe's past; that there were also times and instances of cruelty and neglect; and that until the age of seven children carried the status of dependent infants. However, from around seven, children's economic

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<sup>3</sup> This proposed a progressive interpretation of historical change based on adults acting out their psychological anxieties on children, from medieval savagery and torture to the humane nurturing of children in modernity. This positivist progressive notion of childhood barbarity to civilization was enormously popular.

contribution appears to have been significant, in farming and crafts, as apprentices and domestic servants (Thomas, 2000, pp. 7-12). Historians such as Shahar (cited in Thomas, 2000, p.11) argue that rather than childhood being a modern invention, as proposed by Aries, evidence points to 'childhood' as being in existence in Europe from medieval times onward.

Although many of his arguments have been overturned and his evidence discounted, Aries' work has achieved significant breakthroughs. First, his central tenet, that childhood is a social construction and not a natural phenomenon now informs all current theory on the new sociology and anthropology of childhood. Second, his work has established that children's everyday lives are of real and lasting importance, and last, that children and childhood studies need to be understood and placed in their historical context (Corsaro, 1997, p.50-51). In effect Aries' main achievement has been to open the door for a new history, sociology and anthropology of childhood, in which questions, such as who is a child, and what and when is childhood, are of major interest to social theorists. For instance, Oldman (cited in Thomas, 2000, p.12), suggests that in accepting childhood as a social construction, western children prior to 1900 can be defined primarily *by* their social class, whereas after that children can be more usefully understood *as* a social class, so marked has their separation from the adult world become.

### ***The Dominant Paradigm***

Moving now to a discussion of the paradigm which has dominated childhood and children's studies for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I do so with the following question in



mind. How has it come about, considering history, anthropology and sociology are the older disciplines, that psychology seized the study of 'the child', creating an authority that has lasted for most of a century? I anticipate some answers emerging in the following analysis, which will be linked to understanding how children in disasters have been enclosed within psychological and medicalized narratives.

The central concept in the dominant and dominating paradigm of childhood is that of developmentalism. Developmentalism uses a three stranded approach which grounds childhood in rationality, naturalness and universality, combining biological and social processes of childhood. So much has this approach permeated western understandings of children and childhood, it has assumed a level of epistemological 'commonsense'. Childhood is accepted as being outside real social time, and children are seen as unfinished humans waiting for adulthood, or simply as part of adult history (Thomas, 2000, p.21), Prout & James, 1997, p.10-14). This 'unfinishedness', Toren (1993) argues, lies behind anthropology's broad indifference to children as active social actors, although not to child rearing practices, mostly because the outcome of socialization is presumed to be already known, that 'children simply become ... what their elders already are' (1993, p.461).

How does developmentalism work? How has it become the universal theory of childhood by almost all who work with children? Thomas (2000, p.21) and James and Prout (1997, p.10) argue that the model is deeply embedded in the biological sciences; a self-sustaining model, based on the ways organisms change over time in particular patterns. In human development this notion is transformed into a series of stages, referred to in current psychological theory as 'epigenetic', where the developmental

stages are not entirely fixed, but include some adaptive possibilities (Thomas, 2000, p.21).

Very briefly, the three elements, rationality, naturalness and universality are informed by and situated in a scientific base. The desired outcome, rationality, is achieved by progression to adulthood, and to this end children are perceived as presocial apprentices. The legacy of Freud here is very evident. Children are seen as 'natural' beings, irrational, wild, both dangerous and in danger. The goal of socialization is to convert the naturalness to cultural rationalism, to change the irrational to rational, to move from simple to complex behaviours, from nature to nurture. Aries (1962) argues that many of these concepts were founded in Enlightenment ideas about moral education, and were further enhanced by 19<sup>th</sup> century social Darwinism, as children were perceived to move in similar stages, from innate savagery, to barbarism, to civilization; from biological nature to social nurture.

Models of child development were dominated by Freudian and Piagetian thought for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Piaget, (1896-1980) a Swiss psychologist, proposed that children developed intellectually through a series of predetermined stages, perceiving and organizing their knowledge in qualitatively different ways from adults. He believed children progress from one stage to another via a process of 'equilibrium' which is to say, through mental activities the child engages in when dealing with new realities or 'intrusions' on their 'social and ecological' worlds. This process Piaget described as innate, but linked intrinsically to social interaction (Corsaro, 1997, p.12-13).

Piaget believed the various predetermined cognitive stages could be recognized and read by symbolic markers such as play, language and social relationships. But the stages in Piaget's vision of child development are in essence isolated ones, based on individual development, with 'the child' representing the laboratory for the 'scientific' study of primitive cognition, tracking the sequential progress from pre rational infancy to logical, competent adulthood (Prout & James, 1997, pp.10-12, Thomas, 2000, pp. 21-28). His theory owes much to the work of Freud.

Piaget's model is now paradigmatic for many of the social practices and technologies surrounding childhood and children in western social theory. This is evident in education, family and socialization theory, in child rearing manuals, and even the play and toy industries; in effect, in almost everything to do with children's lives. The theoretical construction has effectively become the lived practice, the received common sense (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1992, pp.37-41). In sociology, Piagetian theory wove its threads into theories of socialization from the 1950s on, where socialization was seen as the process by which social roles (seen as functionally necessary) were generationally internalized and reproduced (James & Prout, 1997, p. 13-14).

To return to some of my earlier remarks, by the late 1970s and 1980s these views were under considerable challenge. Rafsky, (cited in Prout & James, 1997, p.12) criticized the glossing of ways children become socialized, as 'a vague, somewhat muddled...excess of psychologizing'. Denzin (1975), and Spier (1976) (cited in Thomas, 2000, p.16) called for a thorough review of traditional psychological perspectives in the sociology of childhood, arguing that the 'developmental stages'

socialization had been over emphasised, at the expense of interactionist interpretations and narratives of the child's lived experience. By 1990, anthropologists Prout and James were strongly critical of how the psychological model had conflated individual cognitive development with physical growth, which they saw resulting in children as 'immature, irrational, incompetent, asocial, and acultural, with adults being mature, rational, competent, social and autonomous' (Prout & James, 1997, p.13).

### ***The New Paradigm***

The key tenets of the emerging paradigm as identified by Prout and James (1997) are cited so often by fellow childhood researchers as representing the most comprehensive summary of the major factors underpinning the new perspective, that I quote them in full here for that reason:

1. Childhood is understood as a social construction. As such it provides an interpretive frame for contextualizing the early years of human life. Childhood, as distinct from biological immaturity, is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies.
2. Childhood is a variable of social analysis. It can never be entirely divorced from other variables such as class, gender or ethnicity. Comparative and cross-cultural analysis reveals a variety of childhoods rather a single and universal phenomenon.
3. Children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, independent of the perspective and concerns of adults.
4. Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes.
5. Ethnography is a particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood. It allows children a more direct voice and participation in the production of sociological data than is usually possible through experimental or survey styles of research.
6. Childhood is a phenomenon in relation to which the double hermeneutic of the social sciences is acutely present (see Giddens, 1976). That is to say, to proclaim a new paradigm of childhood sociology is also to engage in and respond to the process of reconstructing childhood in society. (p.8).

### ***The Anthropology of Childhood and Children***

It is now time to ask what role anthropology has played in reconstructing the domain of childhood. Certainly there has been a much longer involvement than sociology. Almost from the discipline's inception, anthropologists have shown interest in child rearing practices. In the 1920s and 1930s, pioneers in the field, American anthropologists Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict (in the framework of the 'culture and personality' school), demonstrated that cultural factors were crucial to determining child development, and that different cultures with different child rearing practices produced different personality types (Thomas 2000, p.13). Despite criticism of their work (particularly Mead's) by Freeman (1983) and La Fontaine (1986) (cited in Thomas, 2000, pp.12-13) as being overly simplistic, concentrated almost exclusively on the family and domestic sphere, and ignoring the wider social framework, their research did identify early on in anthropological research how varied child rearing and socialization practices were between cultures. However, few early ethnographies addressed children's perspectives or included children's voices, instead they focused on adult-centred notions of childhood, based on traditional psychological models of child development.

Generally speaking, children in anthropology have until a decade ago been treated as silent and oversocialized. Yet one or two anthropologists vainly sought to challenge this almost thirty years ago. For example, Charlotte Hardman (1973) dared ask "whether there is in children a self regulating, autonomous world which does not necessarily reflect early development of adult culture?" (cited in Prout & James 1997, p.19). Her question prefigures by twenty years the work of Christina Toren (1993) on the significance of childhood cognition.

Because anthropological and cross-cultural psychological studies of childhood over the past century have taken such a variety of analytical approaches, I feel it might be useful to include here a summary of these approaches. These can be categorized as follows, noting that there is some overlap between them:

- *Cultural relativism* – as already mentioned, Mead and Benedict, in the 1920s and 1930s strongly supported the nurture over nature argument, and critiqued the universalist model, but held to the psychological socialization model. Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1987), more recently, has argued forcibly on the basis of her fieldwork in Brazil among sugar workers, against a universalist childhood model, and also against the primal mother-child bond. Looking at the options of the poor, she shows that without modern technologies for birth control, infanticide can become acceptable.
- *Neo-Freudianism* –based on the premise that the psychological conflicts of childhood reappear and are reflected in adult character, Erikson, in the 1970s, using Freud's framework of stage theory, claimed that the progressive stages of development, from early infancy to old age were defined by periods of crisis, and that these crises were universally experienced but in different cultural forms (Bessant, Howard and Watts, 1998, pp.27-28). Such studies involve the comparison of childhood activities in different cultures.
- *Neo-Darwinism* – concentrates on physical environmental factors. Anthropologist Robert Le Vine (1998), one of the principle protagonists in this field, which favours intercultural studies of child development, sees community goals for children, such as health, skills and ethical understanding, as the major factors behind community driven environmental change. For example, his comparative

studies in child rearing in village Kenya and middle class America highlight differences between ‘socialization’ and survival; the Kenyan model opting primarily for survival based on health, the American for socialization (Le Vine, 1998, pp. 116-126). At the core of his theory of *environmental optimisation* lies the notion of evolutionary adaptation.

- *Developmental Psychology* – here the most widely used model, as elaborated previously in this chapter is Piagetian stage theory. This, and the ideas of Russian psychologist Vygotsky influenced a number of anthropological studies through what Ingelby (1985, cited in Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers 1992, p. 51) termed the “psy complex”, of psychology, psychiatry and biomedicine. Examples of ethnographic studies using this approach include the study of Amish children’s socialization and education by Hostetler and Huntington (1971), Levy’s (1978) (cited in Rapport & Overing, 2000, p.30) examination of how Tahitian children acquire non-aggression skills, and Goodman’s (1993) research into homesickness among Japanese children (cited in Rapport & Overing 2000, p.30).
- *Role theory* – an approach based on the relational nature of identity, where anthropologists explore the ways social interactions between adults and children give rise to interdependent roles. For instance, Harkness and Super (cited in Rapport and Overing, 2000, pp.30, 423) looked at culturally specific ways in which adults, by having children, learn to be parents. Goody (1982) examined the relationships between parenthood and social reproduction, showing how adults who foster children learn to be kinspeople (cited in Rapport and Overing, 2000, pp. 30,134).
- *Self-consciousness* – anthropologists have long considered the study of self awareness, identity and consciousness in different cultures, and different times, a

fruitful field for research. As well as being influenced by the 'psy complex', some anthropologists have found the 1930's work of G. H. Mead on the self in society, of major significance. Mead's account of the genesis of the self and consciousness in relation to others, is one of the earliest psycho-sociological analyses in the field. In it, he argues, that indeed, there can be no self without society (Coser, 1971, pp.334-339). Burkitt (1991, cited in Thomas, 2000, p.26) has argued against the dichotomy underpinning developmental psychology models of the "individual" and "society". Using Foucault, Marx and Elias, as well as Mead, Burkitt argues for an understanding of 'being' as only existing in social space, and that the notion of personality consequently, is "meaningless outside social interaction" (cited in Thomas, 2000, p.26). In this, at least, he reasserts Mead.

- *Social policy and social critique* – often found in the area of applied anthropology, many studies in this field have focused on children's lives within institutional frameworks such as school and the family, and have served as indicators of welfare and inequality. Social critique, following the theoretical leads of Bourdieu, Gramsci and neo-Marxism, seeks to unpack the hegemonic practices behind social reproduction processes. In social policy, researchers such as Peter Willmott in the 1960s and 1970s provided in-depth studies of families and kinship in London (Willmott, 1966), while more recently Catherine Panter-Brick gives an historical account of how bio-anthropology has contributed to cross-cultural studies of child health, using field data from Kenya, Nepal, Senegal and Britain (Panter-Brick, 1998, pp. 66-101). Studies are now available on the place and importance of children's work both in western and developing countries (Weiner, 1991, cited in Panter-Brick, 1998, p. 94, Solberg, 1997, Glauser, 1997). Jens Qvortrup (1997) is one of the few researchers asking for children's voices to be



heard in quantitative analysis, arguing against the numerical marginalization of children in statistical accounts of social inequality. In social critique, early studies include how children learn to work within class boundaries (Willis, 1978); children learn to live and die in poverty (Scheper-Hughes, 1992); children of the street and in the street (Glauser, 1997); children who live in conflict situations (Scheper-Hughes 1998).

The past decade on the international front has seen an upsurge in anthropological research on children and childhood studies, impacted and informed by the new epistemology. This has resulted in a partial dismantling of the universal, natural model based on positivist evolutionary logic, with many anthropologists such as Laerke (1998) cutting completely away from traditional approaches. The new anthropology of childhood approaches the field as a socially constructed phenomenon which varies with class, gender, ethnicity, culture and place. Children are recognised as having voices which need to be heard, rights to consultation, and participation in the policies and decisions which affect their lives. Adults working in the anthropology of childhood are now seeing children's constructions of meaning in social relationships as being reliable, valid and worthy of research (Thomas, 2000, p. 102).

There is also now widespread agreement among sociologists as well as anthropologists that ethnography is the most successful and useful methodology for allowing children's voices to be heard, for the multiplicity of childhoods to be explored, and for receiving children's present realities, rather than relegating them to historical narratives or eyeing children for their future potential (Thomas, 2000, pp 48-51, Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 1992, Prout and James, 1997, pp. 4,5).

Erica Friedl's 1997 ethnography of Iranian village children, *Children of Deh Koh: Young Life In An Iranian Village* is an exciting example of the new ethnographic enterprise.

This last section of the chapter will briefly examine the work of two of those involved with the 'new' anthropology of childhood, whose voices and research have done much to challenge the still dominating paradigm informing current policies and practices regarding the place of children in disasters and conflict zones.

James (1995, 1998, cited in Thomas, 2000, pp.5-20) has continued and expanded her earlier work. In a recent examination of recent theoretical trends emerging from the new paradigm, she has identified four main ways in which social scientists 'see' children; as the *developing child*, *tribal child*, *adult child* and *social child*. The *developing child* is closest to the traditional model, where 'the child' is constructed as of low status, vulnerable, incomplete, incompetent and lacking the capacity to deal autonomously with everyday experience. The 'tribal child', while viewed as being competent, and engaged in a culture which is seen as independent and whose participation in research is seen as valid, is nevertheless still not regarded as enjoying a matching status with the researcher. The 'adult child' is given comparable status with an adult, having adult capacities and competencies, whereas the 'social child' is viewed as being independent, autonomous, but having different, but not lower status social competencies (Thomas, 2000, pp.102-104). James' research is rooted in a commitment to maximizing opportunities for children's voices to be given equal but different status with adults.

Another key figure in the field is William Corsaro, current Professor of Sociology at Indiana University, who has worked extensively in the field of cross-cultural children's studies in the United States and Italy. In 1997 he challenged the prevailing orthodoxy in a major study, *The Sociology of Childhood*. He extensively reviews the dominant paradigm, from Freudian analysis to the determinist and constructivist theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, before presenting his own model of *interpretive reproduction* (Corsaro, 1997, pp.18-27). Corsaro argues that the earlier theories of developmental psychology fail to engage with the complexity of children's world views, the social and cultural processes within which they construct meaning, and the complex nature of children's competencies, capacities and collective activities. The *interpretive reproduction* model focuses on understanding how children construct, interpret and reproduce knowledge from their every day worlds. He uses a model derived from an orb spider web to explain the movement of children through a spiral of peer cultures, and the radii of the web indicate the social collectivities and structures children penetrate in their growing (1997, pp.30-44). Corsaro's work makes a significant contribution to the new paradigm, in its emphasis on the importance of social interaction and seeing children as active producers of knowledge, rather than just recipients.

## **CONCLUSION: *Reflections and Perspectives***

### ***Reflections***

In this section I want to draw together the main strands I have presented in this thesis, and to reflect on what directions anthropological research into the place of children in disasters might take in the future.

In the first chapter I discussed the main elements of the definitional debate surrounding 'natural' disasters and showed that since the 1970s traditional perspectives of disaster causation have changed, following engagement in the field by sociologists, anthropologists and cultural geographers (Hewitt, 1983). For example, Oliver-Smith and Hoffman (1999) have shown how a number of anthropologists, including themselves, are helping reshape our understanding of disasters; that while natural hazards such as earthquakes, hurricanes and droughts are natural events, they are not necessarily disasters. Rather, disasters are complex phenomena, occurring at the interface of the natural, technological and social.

Anthropology has engaged in disaster research using several perspectives. These were identified in Chapter One as historical and archeological, politico- ecological, socio-cultural and behavioural, and applied and practical (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman 1999). However, after an extensive search through the anthropological literature on disasters I found no body of research existing on children in disasters.

In the second chapter I examined the literature on disasters which *did* include children. In examples from media, gendered, conflict and psychological approaches to disaster, I found that overwhelmingly children in disasters were enclosed in 'psy complex' narratives. How did this enclosure come about? In Chapter Three I think the answer was at least, partly revealed in my discussion of the new anthropology and sociology of childhood and children, which found that until very recently, both disciplines, thanks to psychology's development theory, perceived children as pre social and 'unfinished' beings, passive receivers of culture and social information. However in the last decade this paradigm has begun to be challenged by a number of anthropologists, sociologists (Prout & James, 1997, Corsaro, 1997, Toren, 1993), and even some psychologists (Burman, 1994, Morss, 1996).

The new paradigm that has emerged suggests childhood is not universal, but is socially constructed, varying with culture, class, ethnicity and gender; and that children are active, social agents creating meaningful knowledge and relationships in their lives; worthy of study in their own right. With the new turn, therefore, there are now possibilities for bridging the discourses of disasters and children. How might this occur?

### ***Perspectives***

For anthropology to engage with children in disasters several approaches seem possible. Firstly, questions have to be raised which interrogate the influential and powerful discourses of psychology. Indeed, whose voices lie behind the

medicalization of children in disasters? Breslau's (2000) dissection of practices and technologies such as PTSD and debriefing seems a good starting point for this approach.

Secondly, anthropology needs ethnographies written in consultation *with* children in disaster situations. Researchers with children are showing a variety of ways that children can be heard, participate and direct research enterprises. New and innovative techniques and practices are available which empower and include children as co researchers and participants (Laerke, 1998, Roberts, 2000, Morrow, 1999, Christensen & James 2000).

Thirdly, in both natural hazard based disasters and social conflict situations, more thought is required on the idea of disasters as a continuum in complex humanitarian emergencies. To maintain boundaries between events involving geophysical, climatic, biological or social hazards, and the disasters they spawn, as is currently the case, is counterproductive to understanding the many ways children are involved in the disaster complex. As has been seen in this thesis, the perspectives of those working with children in conflict emergencies such as Gibb (1994), are highly relevant to natural hazard based studies.

Fourthly, conceptual areas where research could be usefully furthered might include; developing the idea of social capital and networks of reciprocity among children in

disasters; another might include exploring the anthropology of place and displacement (Feld & Basso, 1996, Read, 1996). Here, the very young field of 'social cartography' might well be of significance in helping to chart the social changes children encounter in the disaster experience (Paulston, 1996).

A further important space anthropology might fruitfully research is the creative response of children to disasters. Looking at children's art and writings as sources of their re-creation of self, place and community, and working with art therapists could assist this approach. In this area, Christina Toren's (1990, 1993) work on Fijian children's drawings of village spatial relationships such as kava ritual might well provide useful leads. Toren argues for an anthropological focus on processes by which children constitute their knowledge, 'it makes no sense to dismiss children's ideas as immature....children have to live their lives in terms of their understandings, just as adults do; their ideas are grounded in their experience and thus equally valid' (1993, p.463). Anthropologists, she remarks, need to exercise a more discriminatory approach in their acceptance of psychological developmental models, and she further argues for an anthropological theory of cognition, based on collapsing the multiple dualisms and analytical distinctions between 'nature' and 'culture', 'individual' and 'society'. p.463).

Fifthly, Last's (1994) study of the role western histories have played in creating models of children's place in disasters, for instance, the 'children first' paradigm needs further analysis in a variety of cultural settings. And sixthly, anthropologists who work with children in disasters need now to move both within the new sociology

and anthropology of childhood, yet work alongside relief and aid workers, teachers and psychologists, thereby creating spaces for a more interactive dialogue.

What has become increasingly clear throughout this study, is that the potential for anthropologists to work *with* children in disasters, especially in an applied fashion, is very considerable indeed. After all, disasters are increasing across the world, impacting even in industrialized nations, dissolving the boundaries between ‘disaster’ and ‘development’, in such a way that many people are now living lives of perpetual crisis, punctuated by disasters.

Finally, let me go back to the Mozambican tale told in the introduction, about children being like banana trees, capable of surviving even forest fires and look at the place children might take in the healing and recovery following major loss and dislocation. This thesis has drawn attention to and questioned the spaces, silences and enclosures surrounding children’s places in, and responses, to, natural event based disasters. The path this project has taken through these damaged landscapes and their contested discourses has revealed a terrain densely patterned with children as active social agents. While we can see that children in disaster situations are often vulnerable and at risk, they are also capable, resilient and strong survivors, possessing a wide range of social competencies. Children in multiple cultural settings live lives as soldiers, wives, farmers, workers, housekeepers and family supporters, and it is on these identities that disasters impact, far beyond many western based paradigms of childhood. It seems to me that anthropologists, with their long history of weaving meanings from the lived experience of people in communities, are especially well



situated to bring a wider understanding, both inside and outside the academy, as to just why children are like banana trees.

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