

# Using deconstructing developmental psychology to read child migrants to South Africa

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## Abstract

In this article, we consider how we can use the text *Deconstructing developmental psychology* to read child migration to South Africa. We argue that this text offers a useful analytic method for critical reflections on child migrants in South Africa for several reasons. First, it allows us to shift the focus away from children as a taken for granted object of analysis to a focus on the historical and contextual emergence of developmental psychology as a discipline and, more importantly for this paper, the nature of the child that has been produced through this disciplinary establishment. Second, it offers critical reflections on the exclusions created by this dominant discourse of the child which we elaborate. In particular, we make an argument for why a text that reflects primarily on the Anglo/US developmental psychology should be useful in the contemporary South African context. As an illustration, we give examples from ethnographic research that the authors conducted in two borderlands – the South Africa/Mozambican border and the South Africa/Lesotho border. We use this example to show first how the migrant child that is imagined in South African law is a fantasy of the western child imagined in international child rights regimes. We contrast this production of the child with the everyday experiences of child migrants at the border. In particular, the assumption that the family is the natural place for children and the state is only involved with children whose families neglect these responsibilities is rendered nonsensical for children living in borderlands where the state shapes their otherwise everyday practices and activities. We argue that *Deconstructing developmental psychology*

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in its study of the study of childhood helps us understand the ways in which childhood has been shaped and constructed across time and space.

### **Keywords**

developmental psychology, borderlands, unaccompanied child migrants, statecraft, child in need of care

## **Introduction: using *Deconstructing developmental psychology* to read child migrants to South Africa**

In this paper, we use *Deconstructing developmental psychology* to read the border crossing experiences of unaccompanied child migrants in South Africa. There has been extensive focus in the 20 years after apartheid on migrants in South Africa. Whilst migration and its regulation is often presented as a new phenomenon in public discourse, Landau (2011) and others have noted how it continues a long legacy of the control over movement which has its roots in pre-apartheid colonial planning and continues to be driven by a deep mistrust of those who move (Landau, 2011). This paper focuses on children who cross borders without an adult caregiver. As we will discuss, these are children who find a particular place in immigration and policy responses – particular in that they are singled out for response and particular in that the range of possible responses to these children are constrained in many ways.

We begin this paper with an overview of the key arguments put forward in *Deconstructing developmental psychology* that we draw on to shape our reading of child migrants. We then consider the laws that govern child migrants and the notion of the child inherent in this legal framework. We then give a description of the borderlands where our research was conducted, the nature of children's migration and how this is at odds with the way that the law produces the child migrant. We conclude with an analysis of the strategies children develop for managing borders in a context where the formal legal framework that governs their movement imagines a very different child migrant and childhood to the one that moves across South Africa's borders.

### **Lessons from *Deconstructing developmental psychology***

When it was first published, one of the key contributions of *Deconstructing developmental psychology* was to show how we could analyse not just children's behaviour but the study of children's behaviour and it is this overarching idea that provides the impetus for this paper. In other words, for Burman (2008), developmental psychology was worthy of reflection itself as a socio-political product and, more than this, this process of reflection should become a central part of developmental psychology and the psy-sciences more broadly (see Rose, 1985; Parker, 1998). This is in line with a growing acknowledgement that as we study children, far from simply describing what children are like, we equally produce them (see also Prout & James, 2005). We begin with this point because it has allowed for a rich critical tradition that questions

the most fundamental notions of what a child is and what constitutes childhood that has been taken up by so many authors in so many diverse settings (see, for example, Alanen, 2011; James & Prout, 1997; MacNaughton, 2005). This is a critique that has been made possible by broader questions regarding the nature of knowledge and truth that have prompted a rich intellectual body of critical theory across disciplines. Indeed, this is evident in the ways that feminist and post-colonial resources are brought to bear on Burman's critique of developmental psychology. Read in this way, we can consider developmental psychology's function within cultures of meaning rather than accepting it as a discipline that tells us what children are like. This then gives rise to different questions. For example, instead of asking how the ideas of developmental psychology translate across cultures, we can ask in what ways these ideas are part of an implicit set of practices governing childhood across time and space. Instead of asking who the migrant children are and what they need, we can ask how migrant children challenge notions of the child, the family, the state and their interconnections. It is these questions, made visible by the body of critique that *Deconstructing developmental psychology* has played a leading role in, that have been taken as a starting point for this paper.

Working from this broad theoretical starting point, there are four main arguments in *Deconstructing developmental psychology* that we will reflect on because they offer useful points of analysis for how we understand and respond to unaccompanied child migrants in South Africa.

The first of these is that psychology's focus on the individual child (or the mother-child dyad) occludes the important range of social institutions that shape what childhood is. Whilst *Deconstructing developmental psychology* offers examples from many such institutions, all of which are no doubt mutually constitutive, we take for this paper the focus on the state/family connection very seriously. Indeed, the rhetoric of the family and the production of the subject of developmental psychology as the natural connection between mother and child functions to diminish state responsibility for children. This serves to reinforce gender-unequal relationships within families by privileging the role of mother in a child's well-being. The naturalisation of the mother-child dyad, and the very constrained notion of the family and socialisation that it reproduces, hides the power relations inherent in this way of understanding children's needs and closes down the alternate ways in which children's care (and risk) might be understood.

And so, a connected argument that we will take up from *Deconstructing developmental psychology* is that the family is the natural place for the development of the child. Early on in the text, Burman notes that perhaps the most pervasive idea in developmental psychology is that the family is necessary. In this paper, we will expand this idea to consider how this excludes other institutions including the school and the state from the lives of children in ways that is oppressive even as the state is seen as the only solution to this oppression. By paying attention to the social and political influences on the production of the child, we are able to read the disjuncture between the imagined child and the everyday lives of children. In this is an important move – far from simply describing what childhood is, developmental psychology slips into describing what childhood should be. Thus, in the move from

description to prescription, the abnormal is produced and the normal child is reproduced. Indeed, one of the ideas that we will take up most centrally in our examples is how the family is produced as the natural place for children in a context where indeed this is rendered impossible by state practices.

Beyond this, the naturalisation of the mother–child dyad ignores how this is a fantasy of family life rooted in middle-class family structures and practices of Europe. As Burman notes, “wealth structures access to socially valued models of the family” (109) even as politics and economics are seen to be outside the experiences of childhood. Many other authors have critiqued the relevance of such a notion of childhood and family for the majority world. However, in our view, *Deconstructing developmental psychology* goes beyond critiques of cultural relevance to consider instead how developmental psychology arose at a moment of colonisation in which notions of development were framed as a linear accomplishment with the child representing the underdeveloped savage. As Burman notes:

Comparison between the child, prehistoric man [sic] and ‘savage’ presupposes a conception of development, of individual progress, as unilinear, as directed steps up an ordered hierarchy . . . ‘Progress’ is a key term that ties individual, social and national development together (p. 15).

Thus Burman (2008) recognises a constitutive relationship between Orientalism and Occidentalism. By placing the rise of developmental psychology in its historical context, we see the ways in which it developed out of and was allied with the racial classification systems and notions of unilinear developments that are at the heart of colonisation (see also the companion volume to *Deconstructing developmental psychology*, Burman, 2007). So, although some have noted that the examples in the text are largely from a UK context (Claiborne, 2010), indeed, this is the point. It is from this context that the imperial move of universalising a western fantasy of childhood takes place (a point elaborated in the companion volume to *Deconstructing developmental psychology*, Burman, 2007). The normalised mainstream of developmental psychology is precisely produced by the childhoods that are outside of this mainstream. The task is then to consider its consequences in the ongoing colonial legacies of the majority world – a task we take up in this paper.

Finally, we take from *Deconstructing developmental psychology* the idea that the production of the child, whilst rooted in a particular set of European historical conditions, has impacted a range of diffuse everyday practices. Participating in the very productive debates about the psychologisation of everyday life, *Deconstructing developmental psychology* is able to show how psychological ideas pervade a range of practices often with their historical and theoretical roots eclipsed (see De Vos, 2012; Rose, 1985). For example, the notion of the “best interests of the child” appears as an always benevolent, decontextualised idea that puts the child at the heart of all policy responses (see, for example, Swartz, 1989). However, we will describe how it fails precisely because the political nature of the emphasis on the family as the natural place for children is eclipsed from interventions with child migrants (see De Vos, 2012), thus rendering pathological the children’s migration

decisions and facilitating a range of repressive practices against them and their caregivers.

In the sections that follow, we will use these key ideas from *Deconstructing developmental psychology* to read children who migrate to South Africa without adult caregivers. We draw on examples from research that was conducted by the authors in two South African borderlands. We contrast the notion of the child migrant imagined in South African law with the everyday experiences and reasons for migrating that children gave. Our intention in this paper is not to provide the details of the research or its findings but to offer a very brief description of life on the borders to illustrate the points made in the preceding section.

## **The legal production of the unaccompanied migrant child in South Africa**

Given the arguments above, we are able to read the legal provisions for unaccompanied child migrants, not as a simple reflection of the needs of children, but rather as a production of a particular historically and politically rooted childhood. Read in this way, the question becomes not what do child migrants need, but what kind of child is imagined in the way the law is written and which childhoods are excluded? And with what consequences?

We focus our comments here on three pieces of legislation. The first is the Children's Act of 2005 (Government Gazette, 2005), the second is the Refugees Act of 1998 (Government Gazette, 1998) and the third is the Immigration Act of 2001 (Government Gazette, 2001). No doubt there are other laws and certainly there are other pieces of policy that shape how the state interacts with unaccompanied migrant children. However, we use these as illustrative of the ways that law moulds childhood and produces abnormality rather than as a complete review of the laws pertaining to children (for a more thorough review, see Palmary, 2010).

On the whole, each of these pieces of legislation is rather silent on children's mobility. The Children's Act in its draft form made specific reference to migrant children, but this section was removed because, it was argued, the provisions referred to all children and so there was no need to specifically mention migrant children. The Children's Act begins with the statement that its objective is to preserve and promote families, to give effect to the rights of children and promote community structures for the care of children. In the Act, the only explicit mention of child migrants is children who are victims of trafficking. However, the Act does create the category of a "child in need of care". Trafficking victims as well as other vulnerable groups of children can be defined as a "child in need of care", according to the Act. This requires that a social worker sees the child and a case be opened at the children's court (the Act allows all magistrates' courts to operate as children's courts). The social worker becomes the central reference point and they can place a child in a place of safety, or they can attempt to trace the child's family and reunite them.

The only discussion of migrant children in the Refugees Act only mentions children when it states that if a child who is unaccompanied by an adult appears to have an asylum claim, they should be assisted with this claim and treated as a

“child in need of care” as specified under the Children’s Act. The Immigration Act is the most silent on child migrants making provision only for immediate relatives (defined as the nuclear family) of people who migrate under one of the categories of migrant worker. Whilst a full policy analysis goes beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that there is a fairly specific response required when an unaccompanied minor is found or presents themselves at a border. First, the child should be recognised as a “child in need of care”. They should have access to a place of safety and a case opened with the children’s court. Any magistrate’s court is able to operate as a children’s court. The deportation of an unaccompanied minor can only take place if the social worker can reunite the child with an appropriate caregiver.

There are a few cursory points that we want to make about this legal framework using the conceptual tools from *Deconstructing developmental psychology* elaborated above. The first is that the family is the appropriate place for children to be cared for. Thus, the state’s role is limited to preserving and promoting families or intervening to protect those children whose families are not fulfilling their obligations. As described above, this is an example of how the historical construction of the child has occluded the range of political and economic institutions that equally impact on what childhood is and how notions of need are constructed. The second, and related, point is that children who cross a border are vulnerable. Be it through trafficking or parental neglect, there is assumed to have been a tragic separation from their families which therefore requires the state to intervene in a context in which this intervention is presented as a last resort. As we will see in the analysis, this conceals (only thinly) the ways in which borders themselves are an illustration of the ways that the state is embedded in and constrains family practices. Indeed, the only place where the state is seen to influence children and families is in instances where children need protection beyond or from their families. Outside of this, the state is considered to be absent from the lives of children. The emphasis on families works to ensure that state intervention is only ever a last resort for child care. In addition, the migration of children is assumed to be permanent. In creating a policy response that places children in care or assists with family tracing, it is assumed that children who move across a border cannot return, at least not without assistance. The notion of child in need of care has been subject to some critique. For example, Meintjies, Budlender, Gieser, and Johnson (2003) ask, is the “child in need of care” as produced in South African law really in need of care, or is this child more likely to be in need of cash? – thus highlighting the ways in which this legal classification occludes the economic factors that shape what it is that children need. Framing children’s needs in an affective and intrapersonal way excludes the ways in which children’s need and difficulties are shaped by global and local inequalities (such as the inequality between Lesotho and South Africa even as South Africa’s wealth has been generated primarily through migrant labour from neighbouring countries). Whilst a full analysis of these implications of the ways children’s need is framed in law is beyond the scope of this paper, we can already see the importance of locating children within their socio-economic context. Thus, the historical resources from *Deconstructing developmental psychology* outlined

above allow for a different kind of contemporary analysis that does not take childhood for granted and it is this that we take up in the remainder of the paper. We ask what child has been produced in this law and with what consequences.

In the next section, we will look at the children that we conducted ethnographic research with on the South African borders. We will consider how and why they migrate and how the legal requirements for them (fail to) meet the needs and question notions of a “child in need of care”.

## South African borderlands

For several months, we undertook ethnographic work on three of South Africa’s borders namely the South Africa Mozambican border (Komatipoort border post) the South Africa Lesotho border (Ficksberg border post) and the South African Zimbabwean border (Musina). In this paper, we will limit the discussion to the Lesotho and Mozambican border. The time in each border post varied quite considerably from four months in Ficksberg to nearly a year in Musina. Whilst the details of the ethnographic work are beyond the scope of this paper, we briefly describe the children we interacted with at each of the border posts, respectively.

### *Ficksberg*

The South African town of Ficksburg faces Lesotho’s Maputsoe town and the towns are linked across the Mohokare (or Caledon) River by a bridge. This river divides the two countries. Both local people and migrants regard the border, including the port of entry, as porous due to a number of factors such as corruption of border officials, the absence of a border fence, easy to navigate terrain on both sides of the border, the absence of crocodiles in the Caledon River (compared particularly to the Limpopo river that separates South Africa and Zimbabwe) and the low level of water in the river particularly during the dry season. Residents of Ficksburg see migrants crossing the border at various ‘illegal’ entry points along the river every day, especially early in the morning and late in the afternoon. When we enquired, few people we spoke to in the town indicated that they would bother to alert the authorities to people crossing the border illegally. Cattle belonging to people of both countries living in this borderland graze on both sides of the border.

However, there is a huge economic disparity between the two countries and thousands of Basotho live and work in South Africa. Many others including the children we interviewed aspired to do so. Similarly, a number of South African companies operate in Lesotho and when one is in Maputsoe town, it often feels very much like being in South Africa with familiar signage and shops. However, this idea quickly vanishes as there is a marked difference in infrastructure between the countries with Ficksburg clearly more developed than Maputsoe. For example, Maputsoe is dusty and not well lit during the night whilst Ficksburg has tar roads and street lights.

Every day, large numbers of Basotho cross the border to Ficksburg to buy groceries, see relatives, go to hospital, attend school and conduct their everyday

lives. A number of Basotho complained that the cost of living is very high in their country compared to in South Africa and they therefore spend large amounts of their time in South Africa. In addition, a number of Basotho opt to live in Ficksburg rather than Maputsoe as it has better services such as hospitals, schools, shops, housing, and regular supply of electricity. There are also a number of Lesotho nationals who commute every day to work in Ficksburg.

The Ficksburg port of entry is open every hour of the day and for the whole year. It is very busy on Fridays and Saturdays, holidays and then Sundays as hundreds of Basotho and South Africans cross the border. Many of the migrant workers come from Gauteng Province and they carry groceries to Lesotho.

The case of one girl was typical of how children migrated regularly across the border: Christine Moloi was 13 years old and lived with her parents in Maputsoe. Her father works as a general hand in a factory whilst her mother is a vendor at the local market. Given that education is no longer free for her in Lesotho and their household is very poor, Christine's parents told her to find a secondary school in Ficksburg, South Africa where schooling is free until the age of 16. Despite not having a student visa and passport, required documents for a foreign student to study in South Africa, for the past two years she has been walking to and from school every week day. She uses a temporary travelling permit which she sometimes forgets at home.

Although education was overwhelmingly the reason that children crossed the border, there were other reasons as well. Children from Lesotho also crossed the border every day to shop, work (including vending), visit relatives and even to make a cheap phone call to their parent, sibling or relative based in South Africa. Mobile and fixed phone charges are very high in Lesotho. Thus, it makes economic sense for some residents of Maputsoe to just walk across the border and make a phone call. On several occasions, we observed people from Lesotho, including children without legal documents, negotiating without much difficulty with border officials to let them into South Africa for a few minutes just to make a phone call at the telephone booths which are situated less than 50 m from the border post. In other incidents, we observed border officials allowing children without any documentation to buy groceries in Ficksburg. When discussing these border crossings with officials, they explained that they knew that the children would return back a few minutes or hours later.

### *Komatipoort*

Founded in the late 1800s, Komatipoort serves as the gateway to Mozambique via the Lebombo border and is situated within a few kilometres of the Crocodile Bridge entrance to Kruger National Park. The Lebombo border is considered the second busiest border post in South Africa after the Zimbabwean border at Musina and is open from 6 am to midnight except for the Easter and Christmas holidays, when it is at its busiest and is open 24 hours a day. Komatipoort was and remains a predominantly farming town. Many of the townships and villages are

remote and far removed from public services, reached only through dirt roads that are often in poor condition. The area contains sprawling farms of sugar cane and citrus. In between the farmlands are houses of the wealthy (who prefer to live near Kruger National Park), low-income government housing and informal settlements.

As is the case in Ficksburg, the border is porous and most of the people we spoke to stated how easy movement across the border was. It often took a disparaging tone with police officers and locals alike narrating how migrants who come across the border one day, commit a theft and have disappeared by the time the crime is discovered. They will also say that when a migrant is deported, in the vast majority of cases he or she will be back within days, if not hours.

Although locals say the numbers have declined in recent years, hundreds of migrants cross both with and without documentation between Mozambique and South Africa on a daily basis. Unaccompanied children are often irregular migrants, crossing either through the large (now de-electrified) fence that runs along the border on Lebombo Mountain or sometimes crossing through the border post without documentation. Children from Swaziland also indicated that they used irregular means to cross the border. Many children crossed with either an older sibling or other adult. Some children were assisted by smugglers in exchange for payment – a common occurrence on South Africa's borders. There are also children who hover around the border post itself working as vendors selling goods to people waiting to cross. In a few cases, children had crossed the border into South Africa as recently as the day before the researcher interviewed them in the markets.

As in Ficksburg, children's migration is fuelled by economic disparities. Much of the farmland that is in this district is worked by Mozambican migrants. Many migrant children live and work on these farms, with schools existing on farms specifically for children of farmworkers. Other children crossed to South Africa to follow the footsteps of friends, siblings, or other relatives. Some instances presented an opportunity for family unification whereas others were simply cases of seeking a better life for themselves in South Africa. Naas, a town near Tonga, had particularly visible migrant children, though there were many bustling areas in local towns (e.g. Komatipoort and Malelane) where children sought and engaged in work as informal vendors and sometimes begged. As with so many borders, the border itself represents a business opportunity to many children who carry water in large containers as well as groceries across the border regularly, to earn a living.

Most child migrants crossing near the Lebombo border post were irregular migrants. This is likely due to the difficulty of obtaining a passport in Mozambique combined with the perceived lack of difficulty entering South Africa without documents. Few of the migrant children interviewed had experienced direct problems with the police. During the research, a number of migrant children were observed attending South African schools. It was clear not every child was documented and for many it was not very important. However, in at least one instance during an interview, a school administrator indicated that the migrant children did not always have documentation, but that she wanted to enable them to

study. Police indicated that migrant children enrolled in schools were presumed to have the necessary documentation. They pointed out that it was the responsibility of schools to ensure that migrant children were legally enrolled and did not bother checking children's documents. School-going children interviewed indicated that they did not fear the South African Police Service members who came to the schools for outreach activities. In fact none of the children we interviewed had been asked for documentation or singled out for being migrants.

Thus, border control was erratic and not always seen as a priority. The border fence has been de-electrified and it, as well as other infrastructure, has fallen into disrepair. The border is also not as heavily guarded as it once was. Lebombo Mountain has several paths on the South African side leading down to the N4 main road (near the actual border post) or the Mananga road towards Naas and Tonga where many migrants go. Local police, both at the border and in Komatipoort, are well aware of these paths and have become accustomed to seeing undocumented migrants on a regular basis. Observation with police revealed both random checks being done with migrants but also instances during which checks might have occurred but did not. In addition, Nkomazi is extremely hot. By summer the 40 degree temperatures coupled with nearly 100% humidity can make days unbearable. Police officers sweated in non-air conditioned police vehicles and those on the border regularly moved positions along with the shade, rather than following the busiest migration routes.

During observation, a small number of children appeared to move relatively freely and seemed accepted as part of the border area. Given that a number of police officers at the border observed that there was too much traffic to thoroughly complete all of their tasks, it seems that the presence of migrant children was a secondary priority to other tasks. A 17-year-old Mozambican boy explained that he often crossed back and forth between Mozambique and South Africa, explaining that he pretends to help people with their luggage in order to cross. He reported the plan often working, but also watched out for officers who seemed more likely to be checking documentation.

## **Reflections on the everyday life of the law**

These short descriptions of children's everyday life at the border provide a stark contrast to the notion of childhood produced in the legislation. None of the children that we observed crossing borders were the children imagined by the legislative framework outlined above. They were not the refugees, trafficking victims and orphans who are thought to cross borders. Whilst some of the social workers in the border areas made it clear that crossing an international border meant that the child would qualify as a "child in need of care", in practice this meant that the child had simply travelled a (by South African standards) relatively short distance to attend school or get some groceries. Had it not been for the fact that this trip meant crossing a border, this would not be considered an inappropriate thing for a child to do. Walking a few kilometres to school certainly would not constitute the kind of neglect that would allow for state intervention.

Indeed, if the provisions of the law were to be followed, the consequences could be comic. First, there are so many children crossing borders that the one social worker posted in each of the towns would be entirely unable to cope with the workload. The delays at the magistrates' court would mean the child might wait several weeks to have a case opened at the court. Family tracing and reunification is not needed since the children have families that they return to sometimes on a daily basis and who they can easily make contact with. Placing them in a place of safety would in fact be what separated them from their families rather than being a response to this separation. It would accomplish the exact opposite of what the law states as its objective, namely, to preserve families.

So what did police and border officials do with unaccompanied child migrants? Given the difficulty in responding to children in the ways that the law prescribed, border officials adopted a number of informal systems of border control that reflected the realities they faced. Some would simply let children cross the border and lecture them about making sure they returned by the evening. Others would take the opportunity to extract a bribe and then let the children pass. Indeed, children complained bitterly that they could cross the border at any time of the year without trouble until it was exam time at school. Then the border officials knew that attending school was extremely important to them and would ask for bribes. Other officials who found children on the South African side of the border would simply drive them back over the border and drop them off. A final strategy was to ignore border crossings except when there was an "operation" and for a few days police would zealously prevent children from entering the country and detain those who had. After such "operation", the regular crossings would return to normal.

The children too seemed well aware of the ambiguous and informal rules governing their movement. In some instances, children had received advice from other migrants on what to expect and what to be wary of, learning the situations to avoid. These included knowing how to spot one of the stop-and-search "operations" when they were taking place, for Mozambican children knowing that a vaccination mark could be used to identify them as Mozambican, and avoiding contact with the police by making sure they always behaved well and never committed crimes. As one child told us, "I was told that South African police, they usually don't confront people. They won't find you in the street and confront you. But if you commit a crime they will definitely arrest you. That's what I was told about South African police". Others learned to wear earphones and avoid eye contact with officials as they passed the border or to only change into their school uniform after having crossed the border. On a daily basis, these unspoken rules were negotiated and accepted by officials and children in order to make it possible to live in an area geographically divided by a border. We would not want to romanticise these informal agreements between border officials and children. Indeed, there were reports of instances where border officials used the illegal status of children to assault, rape and detain them. We would therefore not want to argue that migrant children do not face danger. However, the danger is one created by the intervention of the state even as state intervention is cast as being

warranted only in instances where the child lacks adequate family care. Despite how brutal some of the actions of border officials were, they were nevertheless part of an informal system of managing the border in a context where the law could not. Whether benign or violent, the border was managed by a series of informal, shared but nevertheless negotiated set of practices that were entirely outside of what the law saw as possible or necessary.

The law described above draws on a notion of the state as a natural and self-contained geographical space representing a geographic, cultural and economic divide (Malkki, 1992). This is an assumption that Alvarez notes has equally been evident in early border studies. For him the assumption that a border “separate[s] cultures and defined boundaries” (Alvarez, 1995, p. 453) is an all too often perpetuated myth. Recognising the border as a myth, immigration control can be understood as the battle to reconstruct the notion of the self-contained state in a context where movement of people threatens to undermine it. Within contemporary models of childhood and the state, it is difficult to imagine the child as a threat to the sovereignty of the state. However, as Doty (2004) has shown, the idea of borders and border control reinstating an order and security that is threatened by the movement of people is a central practice of statecraft which, in the preface of her text, is defined as “the making and practices of nation-states and their co-requisite axes of identity formation” (p. x). Therefore, our argument that the border is often irrelevant in the everyday life is not to say that the border does not come to matter enormously in the lives of children. In its efforts to reproduce the state as a natural and necessary entity and to claim a monopoly over the movement of people (see Torpey, 2000 for more), a great deal of attention is paid in law to the movement of people without the permission of the state. However, it is clear from this study that the power to control the border is diffuse and, at most times, the reality on the border bears little resemblance to the border and the migrants imagined in the law. This is not the forms of border control that Torpey and others describe in the West which are technologically advanced and highly regulated. They are informal, often undetermined and diffuse practices of nation-state creation. Indeed, the economic educational and domestic imperatives that drove children to cross the border are clearly more powerful forces than state forces and disrupt the mythology of a clear inside and the outside.

Furthermore, the imposition of the border creates new and complex social systems of power and social relationships. Of interest here is how the presence of the border as a social system and the ways in which it turns children into unaccompanied minors, with the associations of being in need of care, is indicative of how the state is always already part of family formations. In this instance, it is the practice of constructing the nation-state through policing borders that changes these children into the vulnerable unaccompanied minors imagined by international child rights frameworks and domestic legislation – which the nation-state is then precisely positioned as entitled to intervene in. Given the examples of everyday border life above, the state cannot be seen as a disinterested and neutral party whose only role is to protect children whose families fail to. Rather, practices of reinforcing the state as natural

shape and create children's exploitation. The violence that children do at times suffer is not a result of family failure (or indeed a lack of care), but rather is created by the presence of the border which renders them undocumented and vulnerable to abuse by border officials. Linked to this is the assumption in the law that the child who has crossed a border has left their family and the family that allows this has abandoned responsibility. Rather child migration is part of the everyday economic and educational decision-making that families have and the fact of crossing a border, whilst making children's movement more difficult, does not in any way indicate the extent of family care for the child.

In attending to the dilemma of a legal framework for child migrants that seems so at odds with their actual migration experiences and their actual needs, we are able to see how the law itself participates in the making of the social world and the reproduction of vulnerability and inequality rooted in citizenship and family membership. This question is particularly pertinent given that South Africa is seen to have exemplary child rights laws. In many interviews with social workers, they enthused about how wonderful South African laws were but they understood the problem being one of a lack of implementation. What we hope the above examples have shown instead is how, far from a simple problem of poor implementation, the implementation of the law would be impossible given the kind of child migrant imagined in the law and how far removed this is from actual migrating children's experiences.

## Returning to deconstructing developmental psychology

Following from this discussion, we see that the notion of the nation-state representing a meaningful social identity finds support in the prevailing notions of the child which equally define childhood as separate from economic and political activities. Returning to the conceptual resources offered in a text like *Deconstructing developmental psychology*, we can begin to understand the disjuncture between the imagined child of policy and the real child as follows. First, in universalising the migrant child as being in need of care, we have an image of the child who migrates as one who has been tragically disconnected with their family. There are no doubt children for whom this is the case. However, this does not represent a description of most migrant children. Rather it creates a very constrained notion of what a child might need shaped by a naturalised model of family and child constructed through a history of developmental psychology. The law is instead a normative production of who migrant children should be. However, this normative production of the child is far from innocent. The expectation of vulnerability results in a series of responses which further marginalise the actual children who live on the border and at times render them vulnerable to violence. The naturalisation of the border as a place where cultural, social, economic and political ties end makes children's migration a tragedy, rather than a benign everyday practice. From this position, it is then possible to understand the unaccompanied migrant child as only ever vulnerable and "in need of care". In practice, however, the border is a place where the state makes otherwise ordinary

activities such as making a phone call or going to school a political and problematic act.

Second, *Deconstructing developmental psychology* allows us to critique the notion of the child that we find in a range of places including the law, the clinic and the school and allows for the reflection on the politics and consequences of such representations. However, extending this analysis, we can equally recognise the constructed nature of the border and how the child and the border participate in a mutually constitutive way in the making of the family and the state as central organising categories of our social world. In the universal and decontextualised representation of the child that is put forward, it is difficult to see the ways in which it is the apparatus of the state that produces migrant children as an indictment on the normative model of childhood (see also Pupavac, 2001). Beyond this, *Deconstructing developmental psychology* allows us to see the particular set of historical conditions that underpin the seemingly universal child. For Burman (2008), the child of developmental psychology has been moulded in the legacy of US/UK western frameworks. The South African law is hailed as an exemplary law on child rights, but this is at least in part because of the ways in which it sets out a notion of childhood based on the values of western developmental psychology. It constructs the universal child evident both in developmental psychological accounts but also in western accounts of the nation-state (see Torpey, 2000). In universalising these accounts, the real lives of child migrants are eclipsed as are a whole range of other possible needs they may have.

Clearly our argument is not for a law that better captures the lives of children on South African borders. This would reintroduce a notion of the state as benevolent rescuer when families fail. Indeed, the one borderland in South Africa where there is extensive humanitarian, state and other attention is the South African/Zimbabwe border. In spite of the extensive policing of this border and the vast humanitarian programmes, this has been a place with some of the greatest human rights abuses often far greater than those we documented on the borderlands described in this paper. This is to be expected since, as we have argued in this paper, responses to child migrants have more to do with statecraft than the needs of vulnerable children.

## Conclusion

As described in the introduction, this paper draws inspiration from the historical analysis that *Deconstructing developmental psychology* undertakes which shows the historical and social conditions that were necessary for a particular reading of the child which are seldom evident in childhood studies. However, there are many significant ways that this paper is also very different from the task of *Deconstructing developmental psychology*. Perhaps most significantly, this paper has not attempted to add to this historical deconstructive work in the role of psychology in making the child. Rather it is an illustration of the kind of analysis rendered possible by the method of historical deconstruction in *Deconstructing developmental psychology*. This paper is therefore a very selective use and

adaptation of Burman's analytic strategies rather than an example drawn from the field of developmental psychology. It is the historical work of *Deconstructing developmental psychology* that makes this kind of contemporary analysis of childhood possible. In this way, the work maps more closely perhaps to the companion volume to *Deconstructing developmental psychology* (Burman, 2007) which also offers contemporary cultural analyses. However, the resources in *Deconstructing developmental psychology* allow us to connect practices of constructing childhood with practices of statecraft and the making of a nation-state in ways that, at first glance, seem unlikely to be connected.

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