

The state of play: securities of childhood – insecurities of children

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This article is broadly concerned with the positioning of children, both within and outside the subject area of International Relations. It considers the costs of an adult-centric standpoint in security studies and contrasts this with investments made seemingly on behalf of children and their security. It begins by looking at how children and childhoods are constructed and contained – yet also defy categorization – at some cost to their protection. The many competing children and childhoods that are invoked in security discourses and partially sustain their victimcy are then illustrated. It is argued that at their entry point into academia they are essentialized and sentimentalized. Power relations which subvert, yet also rely on children and childhoods can only be disrupted through a reconfiguration of politics and agency which includes an engagement with political literacy on a societal level and acknowledgment of the ubiquitous presence of war in all our lives.

Keywords: children; childhood; security studies; militarization; academia

Introduction

At the heart of this article is an attempt to understand why children are undertheorized in International Relations (IRs) and especially in security studies. It will explore why children are a challenging ‘category’ to think about, but also argue that this only partly explains why so little progress has been made in accommodating them within security studies or challenging security studies to make sense of them. One might argue that political stakeholders and commentators have always recognized children and appealed on their behalf, but vitally the children that are most valued are largely seen and not heard – positioned and increasingly politicized, but not engaged with. Despite their actual integration within political and international webs of power, children as state investments, instruments, symbols, or citizens, are not afforded attention. Although we are surrounded by children and ‘completed’ children, the majority of these survivors may have been failed. Underestimated, undervalued, and consequently underdeveloped, it is argued here that children protected ‘from politics’ in this way are also potentially disabled of their – and our – security. The article illustrates two cases in which children are ‘hidden in plain sight’. It concludes by asking IR and security studies to engage more fully with the socio-political and gendered dimensions of children and childhood.

The child in the net

There is no doubt that children are contested and ‘messy’ referents (Beazley et al. 2009, 366). ‘Child’ is less a lived reality than an assigned concept. There is no agreed definition

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of a child that is in use worldwide for any purpose. Nor is there agreement on the question of how long childhood is or what its duration should encompass.

Age is not sufficient in itself as an indicator of childhood, nor does it illustrate why such persons are potentially receiving or deserving of different treatment throughout this time....A unique and transient period of intense physical, mental, emotional and spiritual development; a time span delineated differently across and within communities and cultures; a managed societal or economic initiation; a portal to romanticised and marketable evocations, images and memories – the consideration of childhood presents a unique empirical and theoretical challenge. (Brocklehurst 2006, 1)

The generally accepted definition in development studies and enshrined in international law is that a child is a person under the age of 18 – unless the age of majority is attained earlier. Although UN lobbying is taking place to bring the age of majority closer to 18, such an age span is not typical of most experiences of childhood. As James (2010, 490) notes, ‘...the category of childhood is fractured not just by the different social constructions of childhood in different political, cultural and economic contexts, but also by the significance of different ages within childhood’. The most common threshold of childhood, prior to which children are treated differently from adults may in fact be closer to 12 years, or even earlier, before puberty, marriage or developed labour capacity. ‘Early Childhood’, from birth to eight years old, might in fact be the most commonly experienced period of ‘childhood’ worldwide. Beyond that period, ‘older children’, ‘youth’, or younger adults may be indistinguishable. They may work, labour, or hold apprenticeships, hold rights and responsibilities, and be entrusted with the care of other children.

It is also difficult to find even biological/psychological qualities of childhood which might be definitive of it were they not also actually shared by at least some of those who are conventionally treated as adults. Dependency, weakness, disability, immobility, ‘child-like’-ness, ‘childishness’, and irrationality can all characterize adults – including politically active adults. Lifespan and absent or underdeveloped vital organs (especially under five) offer the most straightforward delineators of early childhood, also making the youngest children first in the queue for some forms of protection. Pauses in armed conflict for mass infant immunizations offer one such reminder of this. The less developed children are, the less they cope with, comprehend, and assimilate terror and risk. In addition, very young children’s *physical* survival may also be encoded in the psychologically reassuring *proximity* of older, primary caregivers – and potentially vice versa. When a mother dies it doubles the death rate of her surviving sons and quadruples that of her daughters (Hammad and Bindari 2009, 39).

At the other end of the age spectrum, childhood’s termination is equally fuzzy. Physical growth is not itself a sole characteristic of childhood in international law. A person’s physical or biological maturation will often continue into adolescence and beyond 18, finally stopping near the age of 25. Conversely, in terms of moral and cognitive development, children may reach comparable adult levels between the ages of 12 and 14. Adversity and poverty may make the status of childhood redundant – if not the realities of ongoing development. An early adulthood, designated primarily by gun competency in a Brazilian favela, or by life expectancy of 35 in Afghanistan, does much to explain the capacity and decisions of the individuals trapped within these structures and taking, sustaining, or shaping lives accordingly. The categorization of ‘youth’ is equally relevant here, straddling the boundary of childhood and yet not indicating full admittance to adulthood. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

defines 'youth' as the age group from 15 to 24 years and 'young people' as those in the range of 10–24 years. Like the status of child, meaning and significance vary greatly across cultures. In Rwanda, the insecurity of a generation has been achieved through the enforcing of a new criterion for adulthood which is beyond the reach of most males – consequently delaying marriages and weakening entire communities (Sommers 2012). The status of 'youth', often assigned beyond the period of 18 and even up to the age of 35, here marks out permanent social impotence.

The ever-lengthening period of protracted immaturity that characterizes Western pre-adult status provides an additional challenge, wherein young people and adults navigate or sustain a relatively undertheorized terrain of rights and responsibilities in sensitive and arguably political contexts such as sex, unpaid labour, military service, or 'pre'-citizenship. Thus childhood is also increasingly understood to be an adult invention, an accretion of ideals, a matrix of boundaries, and an opportunity for transgression which excites both predator and prey – not least in the digital age of childhood 2.0. For some commentators, late or 'teenage' childhood has been reformulated as 'adolescence' – a century old American invention (Maira and Soep 2004, 245) affirming some particulars of emotional underdevelopment and structural dependency but potentially undermining adequate participation.

Legislation typically refracts, retracts and protracts all these related conceptions of child and adult. Sixteen-year-old children in the UK for example are deemed too young to watch pornography or vote at an age when they can choose to procreate or volunteer for the military service. This is not an unusual situation but it is of consequence that partial or whole cognizance of their actions demonstrated in one sphere is not always directly translated to other spheres. What is at stake here is whether we can concede that in various ways we might *all* develop and mature throughout lifetimes. Tellingly, the term 'emerging adulthood' has been coined to capture the insecurities of the years 18–29, which psychologists, sociologists and neuroscientists, increasingly see as a distinct life stage. These developments are also supported within a new journal of the same name. More recently, scientists have suggested that our brains continue to increase in capability through to middle age and beyond.

However, for over a century, age-ridden, linear, developmental perspectives provided little fertile ground for the effective realization and contestation of children's participation and agency (in politics). One paradigm shift later and multidisciplinary research within the 'new social studies of childhood' now provides some antidote and its own fierce debates are instructive. The child is increasingly, if dominantly, theorized as relational and generational – challenging 'a world more used to dealing with dichotomies than continuums' (Such, Walker, and Walker 2005, 322). To this we can add continuations, fluctuations, transitions, reversals, and even denial of agency. Wyness (2006, 234) describes children as 'structurally marginal and situational competent' – a condition that will be sustained not least because the process of researching *with* children has only just begun. A growing number of authors ask that we attend to these pluralities, tensions, and paradoxes.

Scholars also voice concern over whether the new paradigm and its 'emphasis on agency and competency has led to an undervaluing of the interdependencies and range of relationships (human and material) which are fundamental to all children's lives' (Brownlie and Sheach Leith 2011, 206). Others question if childhood studies is 'yet firmly enough established to abandon the political power of the singularity thesis' (James 2010, 488) and suggest that we cannot yet speak of 'a global childhood or know if childhood can or should replace childhoods' (Nieuwenhuys 2013, 8). James has also

drawn attention to the very different issues confronting Western industrialized countries and children in the majority South. Learning from both,

means that not only will the voices of children be heard but that we will also be able to consider how they experience the structural constraints and commonalities of childhood, and how they use their agency to adapt to or modify these in the context of the diversities of their childhoods. (James 2010, 496–497)

Critically, childhood is temporal and fluid. It is both an empirical reality within and between communities and also a sociological construct which may be operationalized. Children's experiences are thus shaped not only by their underdevelopment as persons, but by their conceptions which are earned and bestowed, constructed and determined, by the many individuals and groups who set and hold expectations of children, individually, collectively, simultaneously, arbitrarily, and even contradictorily (Brocklehurst 2006, 1). By extension, therefore, our conception of adulthood is also uncertain and messy, although this is rarely noted. Who are the 'we' that absorb, reject, or re-create political processes? The growing sociology of childhood (James and Prout 1990) has amply illustrated and problematized agency within childhood – although arguably partial and still unknown – yet there has been no call for a radical articulation of children as political subjects within political disciplines.

This unpromising start to a conceptualization of children and security is a necessary one. To think about children politically engage with many disciplines and multiple realities which anchor down the *child* we may seek to protect or frame the *childhood* that is useful to deploy. As Burman (2008a, 178) urges, we must 'situate ourselves within our accounts of childhood, including our investments – both economic and fantasized – within particular childhoods'.

Children and security

When I began thinking about the presence and the absence of children and childhoods in the discipline of IRs during the late 1990s, I was constantly reminded by my peers that they 'were' thought about. Here the presence of children in the news – most often as infant victims of humanitarian emergencies – or as gun toting teenage boys elided a critical commitment to interpreting their role. Indeed in the 1990s 'the concept of protecting children emerged as a core obligation' (Moeller 2002, 53) – a profitable humanitarian driver which peaked during the moral navel gazing of the new millennium but is still in ascendance through the development of children's rights discourses (Gadda 2008). Security too was a new 'lead concept in the post-cold war world' (Hansen and Buzan 2009, 2) and children were easily mobilized as a face of this breaking new world order. The emotional scenery of this period has continued seamlessly into the 'war on terror', for as Sylvester (2013, 13) notes 'no group is outside war in our global time'.

The shorthand of child – and its subsequent emotional short-circuiting – served General Petraeus well in his appeals to the American nation during the 'war on terror'. His invocations of child abuse by the Taliban to illustrate desperation and immorality was enabled 'precisely because children are thought to be un-political and without agency' (Lee-Koo 2011, 738). 'Afghan children and their experiences became a powerful moral symbol used by belligerents to advance political, military and strategic agendas' (Lee-Koo 2013, 475). Children have thus become 'a social stereotype' (Watson 2009, 6) – convenient signifiers of statehood or instability, typically leading to the wielding of

'humanitarian childhood' (Rosen 2007) reflecting the needs of 'Northern indoor' children (John 2003, 267). In this way the 'African child soldier' prevalent on the Internet is an essential character 'in a catwalk of children that reminds the global North of the infantilism of the global South' (Lee-Koo 2011, 735). In turn, powerful INGOS and charities 'operate an international policy cartel' which deliberately or unintentionally undermines local realities of early childhood (Penn 2011, 110). Analysis of post conflict reconstruction programmes, for example, (Schwartz 2010) shows that it is 'community'-based approaches that most adequately support children's voices and integration of their needs, contributing to a 'stable peace', itself the holy grail of reconstruction. Yet many aid agencies still advocate publicly on behalf of 'children' despite their programmes being necessarily aimed at or contingent on assisting broader social groupings, not least mothers, families, and local communities.

Childhood can thus be shown to be fluid, contested, socially constructed, and shaped by priorities, particularly political priorities. It is not simply natural. Childhood's duration and requirements can be made and un-made and this flexibility provides power for those who deploy children and childhoods in the service of war. Children are part of the calculation of state security and its economics, most starkly in terms of future labour and future wetware for war. Childhood is thus also a 'site for displacement and maneuvering for militarization' (Agathangelou and Killian 2011, 40) and, in the midst of conflict, 'antagonist parties may seek to secure or deprive children of childhood itself' (Netland 2013, 95). Through military orders imposed by Israel, for example, Palestinians have been exclusively reclassified as adults from the age of 16 (Cook, Hanieh, and Kay 2004, 135). They are thus eligible for 'adult' treatment and incarceration and do not have the same rights as their Israeli counterparts of the same age a few streets away. Conversely, the arrival of the pejorative prefix 'child' to 'soldier' does not indicate the beginnings of the practice of soldiering by children. It marks the point at which a society's conception of childhood became incommensurable when harnessed to its concepts of warfare.

It might be argued that societies' unwillingness to think of children as militarized is constructed upon a prior relationship of children to the political. Almost all definitions and concepts of children are premised on a notion of childhood as an experience which has or should have little in common with the political. As Sharon Stephens (1995, 10) notes, children are 'but one in a long trajectory of non-political subjects, including women and the family that are being reclaimed. Participating and invoked in intra-state and interstate practices of security as investments, instruments, resources, and symbols, children can bring relationships – or dependencies – between the personal and political into sharp relief. It is telling, then, that younger children as a collectivity are often harnessed to passive roles in society, whilst youth have often been perceived or experienced as a potential risk to power (McEvoy-Levy 2006) with both projections downplaying their capability for participation in politics. I have elsewhere explored a separation of political experiences and childhood, theoretically and conceptually, as being symptomatic of three related ways in which the relationship between children and the political is enacted. Concepts of the political and of the child can be demonstrated to be antithetical or contained – a mutual exclusivity which can also be traced back through their respective (Western) disciplines. In examples of political behaviour and military accomplishment, for example, childlike behaviour or weakness is denigrated and discouraged. Boys become men during war and 'innocence is lost'. In the midst of this, explicit or sensationalized use of children elicits significant reaction, but not attention to children's participation. On the contrary it fosters the illusion that children were exceptionally and temporarily drawn in the political sphere and not, in fact, prior members of it. 'Infant power' (Brocklehurst

2006) or the strategic harnessing of a transhistorical, transcultural infant in pleas to the national conscience, symbolic of life and society under threat, is one such instrumentalization of childhood in the service of security. Child soldiers are seen as a political anomaly because they are holding military power, and child victims attract attention as the ultimate essentialized civilians in need of humanitarian and/or political assistance. Childhood innocence becomes ‘a useful symbol with which to obscure questions about... interest[s]...[and] power’ (Wells 2007, 60). The poster children of famines, the conceptually and legally inept designation of ‘child-soldier’, the campaigning baby wrapped in a politician, each reinforces rather than counters the perception of children’s unnatural place and agency in politics and masks how emotion informs politics, security, and war-making generally. Significant recognition of children’s actual daily and low profile interdependence with the political world is obscured or prevented. That children’s politicization is simultaneously underplayed in this way actually guarantees their prolific and undisturbed (ab)use in security practices. Children’s nationalization and militarization, particularly in social and domestic spheres, arguably precedes, underpins, and sustains many forms of security – real or imagined. In this sense it is mostly our recognition, not children’s presence that is new.

This does not, however, mean that they are not thought about within the discipline. The concept of security at the heart of IRs has traditionally been understood as, ultimately, the pursuit of security provided by states on behalf of their people. Children may be implicitly and explicitly referred to in justifications for security practices – children can make ‘realism’ more real or provide a moral imperative for liberal caution. Children are thus already present within security studies, as resources and instruments of national security and harbored in the idea of human security. What may be less evident is how the language of security is already contained, as if it is distanced from, and ultimately protecting and not using, children. ‘Sentimentalisation of children’s voices’ further masks how ‘the problem of children’s insecurities...lies...with...structural inequalities’ (Wells 2009, 184). The sphere of the child and, per se, the family and mother has been most silenced in IRs which conceptualizes itself as distanced from these referents and fails to recognize their agency.

To look at political children then, requires an engagement with other spaces, other people, other disciplines, and an understanding of IRs’ emergence as an exclusive set of knowledge assumptions about the ‘international’. An autonomous theory of International Politics has been the central thrust of the discipline, thus the discipline of IRs is firmly implicated in the question of how children and the private sphere are so invisibly politicized and ineffectively secured (Brocklehurst 2006). However one of the paradoxes of society – and potentially security studies – is that it can become ‘child-centered’ whilst remaining anti-child.

Returning the gaze

Underpinned by a humanitarian or rights-based narrative, ‘child soldiers’ have had hegemonic capital for humanitarian organizations (Charli 2000) and offer the most widely researched example of children’s presence in security. Such virulent advocacy has helped establish a near international ‘norm’ against their deployment and changes in rehabilitation practices have been realized. However, although we increasingly recognize that young people can be more than victims or perpetrators in war – they are often depended on and dependent on it for survival – responses to children and war (notably its impact and their rights) have not yet eclipsed the careless fetishization of teenage child soldiers,

rebel youth, and young suicide bombers that permeate humanitarian narratives of war. The iconography of childhood is perhaps one obstacle to theorizing about children. In the very areas where we might argue that their presence, agency or protection is neglected, our uncritical gaze situates 'children and war'. Selected, consciously and unconsciously, for their emotional appeal, photographic images of children permeate war – and perhaps our theorizing – like no other referent (Holland 1992; Moeller 2002; Wells 2007). Such 'war children' are easily positioned as vulnerable: through the asymmetry of stone throwing; as 'noncombatants par excellence' in the semiotics of landmine campaigning (Marshall 2011, 4–5); and, ubiquitously, through the 'disaster pornography' that warscapes sustain (Burman 1994, 239). 'The media, by the success of its artistry, gets caught up in the very processes it seeks to criticize' (Kleinman and Kleinman 1996, 11).

Andersen and Möller specifically caution against the 'discursive-representational security regime' set by photojournalism and note that 'a critique of security that works within the regime of seeing or representational codes of security – as most photojournalism does – runs the risk of confirming both the practices and the idea of security' (Andersen and Moller 2013, 204). There are now many millions of images of child soldiers: armed, maimed, scared, defiant, but also cropped, pasted, and recirculated out of context and copyright. Although there is little research on how captured subjects interpret their visual legacy, the hegemonic image highway of 'Google' is revealing. Using the search engine 'Google image' the search term 'child soldiers' brings up the following eight alternative refinements, informed by web users' collective interests: 'in Africa', 'in Uganda', 'in Sierra Leone', 'crying', 'facts', 'maps', 'dead', and 'international'. One click further in the pursuit of the generic 'child soldier' reveals that images are then automatically organized into themes of 'black and white' (presumably for humanitarian aesthetics), 'Kony' (reference to Kony 2012, and the most viral child soldiers campaign in history), 'girl' (illustrative of their pictorial potency), 'cartoon' (perhaps suggestive of image fatigue/arrival of a satirical sensibility), 'quotes', and 'dead'. In this vast storehouse of misery it is rare to find a photo which does not seek to recreate their vulnerability. There is very little practical advice on how photographs of children public – not least as combatants, or dying – should be selected, solicited, or made. Very few publishers and humanitarian agencies obscure the faces of children and young people in war so that individual recognition is impossible. Notwithstanding the horrific realities of their lives, desperate children have sought attention or been posed by desperate communities and desperate journalists. Dying to be shot and joining the visual collective of 'child soldier' or even 'war child', does not mean that permission has been sought or granted for subsequent circulation of their portrait. Once these images are freely circulating, privacy is violated and, at worst, lives may be endangered through retribution or shame invested on a future adult, their family, or kin. In principle, does responsibility for these risks and children's long-term welfare lie with the image-catcher? Could not permission from children and/or their guardians be established as good practice? Where permission is impractical, or age and competence cannot be ascertained, a limit can be placed on public circulation of these images. An icon can be embedded in the file or image to indicate this. This 'right' can also be extended to any individuals who may not be in a position to consent to their photograph or the consequences of its digital recirculation. Various styles of photograph can also be promoted. Current practice by some NGOs and publishers includes long distance and group shots, portrait profiles, silhouettes, lowered eyes, sunglasses, headware, and also the later editing of photographs to pixilate or obscure the eyes. Do children feature in war art? Should they? Without such measures, vulnerability may be unwittingly perpetuated by many well-meaning accomplices across

the web. For some children in war zones, the capture of their image may have been empowering by the instant affirmation it yielded from their peers. Young people often equate the exercise of power (especially criminal, violent or military activity) with the threshold into adulthood. The acknowledgement of their role, via the opportunity to pose and record it, can further cement this status. In the cases above we are, in effect, speaking for children.

...it may amount to strategic short-term media outreach to portray child soldiers as passive clueless victims, as devastated, and as dehumanized tools of war robotically programmed to kill in purportedly senseless African wars. But these images belie a much more sublime, humanistic and granular reality of resilience, agency, potential, and globality. (Drumbl 2012, 482)

And as Martins (2011, 444) notes, there are few examples of Southern counter-discourse in the representation of children and war in Anglophone and Francophone Africa. In these and many ways children's presence is already constituted in what we think of as 'us' and 'what we perceive as threats to "us"' (Zalewski and Enloe 1995, 281). The current viral campaign to 'bring back the girls, over 200 of whom have been abducted by Nigerian-based terrorist group Boko Haram, may also be indicative of not thinking hard enough about 'them' – about children's security. The public naming of all these girls may ultimately direct further harm to their families (Moore 2014).

What our efforts do seem to portray is an attempt to tell or narrate our fears and stories. To cope – or warn – not to solve. It is ironic, but not surprising, therefore, that we have also written books on security *for* young people before we have written fully about young people engaged in war.

Returning the book

In the local library of the town where this article is written, a child can select simplistic, sensational, fatalistic narratives on the 'war on terror' or terrorism, potentially unaware of an award winning graphic novel illustrating the complexity of 9/11 (Jacobsen and Ernie 2006). The publishing of textbooks on 9/11 and the war on terror has not diminished. Arguably, these texts, in their hundreds, reflect a refreshed militarized sub-culture for children and offer a seductive, often gendered, portrayal of war as 'vocation' wherein terrorism is represented and naturalized as a new certainty about which to become excited, fearful, and ultimately to be responded to as a 'good citizen'. Within such fairy tales of New York, fear and difference are cultivated and evil is mitigated by heroism and war (Brocklehurst 2011). In a typical short example for pre-teens, only one page of text may contain a very brief explanation of 9/11 – evidencing Osama Bin Laden's politics. That the word 'Islam' is emboldened – and not the word 'extreme' in the same sentence – is typical of the careless signposting achieved in these security texts. Other picture books offer a graphic depiction of the attacks on the World Trade Center – an ash-ridden snow globe of reality – where bad men were sent from a far away land to fell the towers. Children can currently access these texts, independently of adults, and particularly teachers, creating an under-researched and anarchic dynamic to learning which may be especially attractive to boys. 'In the real-time of Fox News, and in video games', Deck (2004) argues, 'the simplification of cultures and history is itself a form of violence', To this I would add the largely uninvestigated subculture of children's informational literature (Connolly 2008; Geruluk 2012).

The place of such political and military discourse per se is itself contingent on its place and conceptualization in the curriculum and on the parameters of the political already established in the values of the education system. Should children learn about themselves in relation to international society earlier? If children are capable of learning about religion or citizenship, then why not include the institution of sovereignty or the role of international institutions? At a minimum should we not build links between professional organizations and educational bodies to help craft and review literature consumed by children? Should we be more aware of how children encounter the parameters and constraints of the international, or invitations to fight for international order? The humble book review, largely absent in the UK, may be one important and brave act of counter-security for children. As American library reviewer Bush (2002) noted of one such narrative ‘...Adolescents who wade through the verbiage will probably derive as fair an outline of bin Laden’s life. ... However, outdated material, undersourced allegations and breathless prose do little to aid American readers in understanding why they’ve come under attack’. In this way, ‘political literacy’ and ‘military literacy’ are useful ways of thinking about young people’s participation in security. Literacy is indicative of our ability to read *and* to think through texts. As Law (2006, 167) argues, education ‘to encourage children to think critically and independently’ is the ‘best defence against being indoctrinated’. However, the perceived value of education and its attendant critical capacities are also shaped by war.

Indeed, the social topography of militarized masculinity is also evident in the return of the warrior male whose paranoia is endlessly stoked by the existence of a feminized culture of critical thinking, a gay subculture and a liberal ideology that exhibits a disrespect for top-down order and unquestioned authority and discipline. (Giroux 2008, 61)

If war is posited as oppositional to childhood, then the seduction offered by the warrior is also noteworthy.

As the term ‘combatant’ is replaced with ‘war fighter’ in operational and patriotic rhetoric, so too attention is deflected from the agency that was ‘soldier’ on ‘soldier.’ War is a given and the war fighter as ‘wetware’ is needed, recognized, and valued because there *is* war. Through this simple change of language, ‘wars’ [are] rendered ‘natural’ and ‘inevitable’ but also dehumanized [a dissociation from the corporeal realities of war]. (Brocklehurst 2011, 83–84)

The carefully crafted graphic and rhetoric of the ‘Warrior-Care’ programme in the USA, and its equivalent in the UK, offers another example of how two previously opposed constructs – ‘fighting’ and ‘caring’ – have been harnessed into a new palatable form. What, then, of children’s potential in a society where teaching itself is feminized and reading is perceived as feminine by young boys? In Australia, for example, critical literacy is ‘working against the opposition of masculinity to literacy and language (the feminized knowledges)’ (McLeod 2001, 275). In the UK, masculinity is also deployed to encourage literacy. The *National Literacy Association* notes how attention-grabbing titles such as ‘War Machines: The Deadliest Weapons in History’ (Dougherty 2010), ‘will draw children in – especially boys’. As a zone of autonomy and excitement, ‘play’ itself may be posited as oppositional to education by its participants. ‘Do we undervalue play because it is associated with childhood or do we compromise childhood because we trivialise play?’ (Wyness 2006, 13).

Historians and sociologists have illustrated how, at the height of the Cold War, civil defence was incorporated into American public education and children and families were

subject to both preparations for nuclear attack and education about their role as citizens (Stephens 1997). Children were taught how to use their school desks to ‘protect’ themselves from falling debris, but they were also taught to cope by not crying and ‘to equate emotional maturity with an attitude of calm acceptance toward nuclear war’ (Brown 1988, 90). Arguably, the latter placed them and their society at greater risk and perhaps continues to do so through the transmission of values about international security, fear, and correct responses to it (Crawford 2009). The militarization of play (Stahl 2006) and the militarization of digital childhood (Lesley 2011, 143) offer further evidence of children’s ongoing capital as spectators, consumers, and, ultimately, stabilizers of war. In the UK, the High Street ‘pound’ shops sell plastic replica weapons of war and school attendance dips when new ‘adult’ military games are released. As Deck (2004) notes, ‘war games – also known as “real-time strategy” games – seldom deal with causes of war. The games focus on what happens after war has been declared...[making] the period of peace...unreal time’. Toy shops are strongly bifurcated along the lines of warrior males and beautiful, nurturing souls and the largest retailer of toys in the UK has teamed up with the Ministry of Defence in the promotion of a range of dolls. A similar arrangement exists in the USA. Here, ‘the business of play works closely with the military to replicate the tools of state violence; the business of state violence in turn capitalizes on playtime for institutional ends’ (Stahl 2006, 123). How can we account for a near complete lack of research on children and the militarization of leisure within security studies? Which children are ‘targeted’ and about whose security are they learning? The causal relations of consumption are complex longitudinal enquiries. How we think – or do not theorize – about children is how we treat children. Simplistic toys, books, and websites which engage young people in security and the circulation of terror may arguably create a pseudo-adult experience of autonomy and excitement – and undermine appeals made to children as future conflict-resolving citizens. Development of critical thinking, or the resilience and emotional dexterity required to survive in adversity, may also better serve some children than protected periods of apparent protection. Yet it is clear that children, like the discipline of IR, are largely unprepared for each other. And ‘[i]nsofar as politics merely deconstructs power, it paradoxically marginalizes any group that is less fully equipped for political struggle’ (Wall 2012, 94).

Back to the future

[W]e need to turn our critical gazes constantly on ourselves to ask if, at each time and in each place, we are theorizing for those most in need. Doing so acknowledges that other outsiders will be excluded by our choices, but has at least the benefit of doing so in a limited and contingent fashion. (Mutimer 2009, 20)

To return to Stephens (1995) original statement, in 20 years children have not really been reclaimed as political, not least by the discipline of politics. Some children and some childhoods have been recognized, yet the empirical, if not ‘emotional’, neglect of children in IR is perplexing to the point of instilling academic paralysis. Despite an emerging and substantial literature on the vital political capital of children – through their bodies, minds, and our vulnerability towards particular constructs of childhood – the discipline of IR has not yet exhibited much interest in them (Watson 2009; Marshall 2011). Their security remains unrealized and their relevance too is relatively undertheorized.

It is possible to argue that there has been little advancement in the subject of children, childhoods, and security. Reflecting on the mobilizing trope ‘women and children’,

Puechguirbal (2004, 7) noted barely a decade ago that ‘after years of increased awareness and mobilization of women, the language has not fundamentally changed, thus perpetuating the stereotypes that prevent women from becoming more visible and assertive in the public arena’. One might ask if we simply do not care enough about children. Opportunities are not yet taken. Questions are not posed. Where are children? At what points were men and women also powerful and empowering as somebody’s child or some state’s children? Where are up to 40% of societies in our analyses of power? Child labour – much of it unpaid and via a currency of sex – is only just entering into economic models with rich work emerging, not least in the context of war. Rape and control of girls and boys is also being systematically uncovered in many state institutions as well as traditional theatres of war. Predation has an axis of age as well as gender. In the UK, waves of prosecutions for sexual abuse are occupying the national press as damaged girlhoods and boyhoods from a lifetime ago are verified. How long until children’s contributions –whether passive or active – are calculated in all our webs of power? That scholars of gender and militarization, IR and security studies, have barely lifted the lid on childhood until the last decade (Sjoberg and Via 2010) is thus still disturbing but not surprising. As Enloe prompted decades ago, and Marshall (2011) has shown, investments in boys and girls’ leisure time remain central to many processes of militarization.

A wider and deeper security analysis might start with the ‘peacetime’ relationships and power dynamics in the making of people, including forced procreation, infanticide, gendercide, and the politics of nutrition for mothers and infants (Palmer 2009); the realities of how affection shapes a baby’s (person’s) brain (Gerhardt 2004); and the near global scarcity of midwives. Very young children die easily. ‘When you see children as demanding care, the reality of their vulnerability and the necessity of a caring response seem unshakeable’ notes Ruddick (1995, 47), yet ‘the presence of a child does not guarantee its care’. How do we *know* that we care? As Watson (2007, 31) notes, international discourse, ‘can care less for children, because their mothers care more’. Even in terms of individual or community orientated personal ‘security’, such as health, are we engaged as caretakers? Where does this wedge begin or end? How far does our commitment to care reach? What is the take-up amongst a general population of first aid generally and of child or baby first aid skills specifically? Should children too be systematically trained in basic medical care? Can we unshackle security from the broader issues of politics? Is this not what security ultimately is: the sharp end of a broader and deeper discussion of how we co-exist? When mothers also perish, despite their experience and resourcefulness and perhaps passion to survive for their dependents, this too is a sign of ‘a world that is not working’ (Booth 2007, 13) – failing to protect children at their most vulnerable ages and stages. If we perceive security more widely in terms of right to appropriate nutrition and survival, the picture looks very different for infants than it does for older children and adults (Kent 1995) and far worse again for female children.

Perhaps relatedly, and despite enormous critical advancements, the many needs of the children we do notice are not met. For all their attention, child soldier rehabilitation programmes touch only a fraction of combatants and typically exclude older children (Celina and Wisler 2007) or fail to provide a structurally adequate guard against remobilization (Stark, Boothby, and Ager 2009; Özerdem and Podder 2011). As Macmillan (2011, 75) also notes, international statutes have problematized participation *in war* rather than militarization, accommodating an absence of legal protection for 15–17 year olds compounded by the imprecision of the term ‘participation’, which, like ‘indirect’ or ‘hostilities’, has no precise meaning in the fog of law. Hamilton (2006) identified as recently as 2006 that there were major gaps in provision of children in complex

emergencies: shortcomings included the oversight of domestic abuse and a failure to evaluate children's placements; in both cases, out of sight was out of mind. Men and boys continue to be targeted for sexual violence, rarely reported, and inappropriately documented and treated or addressed and there exists very little longitudinal or evaluative data on the success of interventions or appropriateness of peacebuilding models for girls (Pruitt 2013).

In peacetime, scholars of citizenship note that children's participation – without the constraints of adults' resistance, hindrance, manipulation, decoration, tokenism, tolerance and indulgence (Reddy and Ratna 2002, 18–21) – is also little realized. Commentators even speak of a participation crisis characterized by 'demands for political correctness that lead to the requirement for children to be present in international meetings without sufficient preparation or protection'. Evaluators note that even the most desirable form of participation – 'children sharing participation with adults' – it is not yet evidenced in practice (Van Beers et al. 2006). Yet, as writers such as Morrow (2006) remind us, connecting with children's voices is but a first step. It does not promise agency. In fact children can simply demand that more responsibility is taken by adults. 'There is overwhelming evidence...that children are responsive, creative and measured in responding to calls for their views. The challenge now is to get adults not only to listen, but also to act upon what they hear' (Morrow 2006, 53). As Hartung (2011, 251) notes in groundbreaking work on children's voices, attempts to interpret children as diverse also privilege homogeneity, simplicity, and rationality within their responses. Following this, by learning from children's experiences 'political representation should ultimately mean empowering lived differences to make a difference to interdependent political structures' (Wall 2012, 94). Further, as Wall (2012, 87) argues, children's real democratic representation calls for a new concept of political representation and an 'exercise in *childism*' – 'not just an extension of adult privileges to children, but a restructuring of fundamental social norms in response to children's experiences'.

Partly informed by these debates and the post positivist turn within IRs, we are at the beginning of a more critical juncture in the studies of children and security. Debate has moved on sufficiently for a sub-field to be marked out within which 'sympathies' are being identified – notably 'free-reiners' with an emphasis on child agency or 'caretakers' with an emphasis on child protection – roughly transposed from the sociology of childhood. In their substantial D'Costa, Huynh, and Katrina forthcoming work, D'Costa et al. ask that a middle ground be realized. They argue that critical theory enables a child-centric lens which brings children's lives into focus in analysis of the causes, strategies, and resolutions of conflict. Importantly, it also centralizes children as the site for emancipatory enquiry and,

explores the complex interplay between the creative agency of children and their distinct vulnerabilities in the face of violence, promotes an approach to children's rights and security in global politics that is both protective and empowering and establishes a meaningful place for children in the adult-centric study of IR and the practice of global politics. (D'Costa, Huynh, and Katrina forthcoming)

Will a 'child-centric' approach always be required? Can we use 'kindered' in a similar way to gendered (Watson 2008)? What does 'infantilization' do to infants? Should we adopt or adapt 'citizenship' for children? A pioneering analysis of adults' recollection and articulation of 'lost childhood' caused by violence is perhaps instructive, broken down

into ‘lost child-friendliness’ (environment) and ‘lost childlikeness’ (experience) (Netland 2013, 90). Will we have a working vocabulary that accommodates ‘child worker’, ‘child citizen’, or ‘child politician’ as easily as ‘child soldier’? Will the term ‘child-soldier’ become sufficiently unprofitable that it can be replaced by CAFF (Children Affected by Fighting Forces) and therefore permanently foreclose the lumping together of child soldier attributes (Hart 2008)? Will ‘minor politics’ rescue children ‘from the depoliticized territory of the private sphere of the family, or the technical sphere of service delivery’ (Dahlberg and Moss 2005, 154)?

Children add an extra level of complexity in that their part may be unknowable: their agency must be read and interpreted reflexively (Spyrou Spyros 2011) and through underdeveloped and unfixed voices. We may have to accept ‘methodological immatur-ity’ (Gallacher and Gallagher 2008). Empirically present, simultaneously transient, and conceptually yielding only ‘the tip of the iceberg’, the slippery offersunderworlda challenof ginchildhoodg, vitally important, and complementary experience of ~~Exploration~~ and their childhoods perhaps sit most comfortably within constructivist and feminist analysis – we can no more ‘add’ children to the discipline than we can ‘add’ women. In turn, children as a category are likely to be feminized and yet also framed and bifurcated along traditional male and female lines. Burman (2008b) urges us to look beyond dichotomies such as work versus play and women versus children, the latter being ‘neither equivalent nor separable’. And, as Enloe (2010, 218) argues, we also need to be ‘conducting a more energetic analysis – one that does not refer lazily to “families,” “ children,” “ parents”...as if women and men related identically to each’. To think about children’s security therefore it would be better to consider women andchildren’s enabling and disabling of each other. The ‘positively messy understanding of in/security as a discursive terrain’ (Rowley and Weldes 2012, 515) is likely to create the most traction here.

The ubiquitous presence of children and, indeed, the development of all kinds of children into all kinds of security bearers, signals their unique complexity as a referent group. If we ask ‘where are the children?’ would the necessary corollary be to also define ‘adults’ as a subject of IRs or security? ‘Child’ might circumscribe both the ambiguous societal and political capital of vulnerable, demanding, and emotionally priceless infants and youth – our neighbouring and most feared cohort. We also cannot use child and adult as mutually exclusive terms. We are all somebody’s child. We can all be childlike. But we are not all somebody’s adult and we cannot all be adultlike. The development we share with children is increasingly significant. Age and our contingent expectations of it thus might be useful dimensions to explore further in IR. We seem to have a telling paucity in our conceptual arsenal to theorize children. There are probably more types of childhood than snow – but snow has arguably been more adequately represented within, and beyond societies which depend on it.

The unwillingness of the academy to recognize this area of study is a final challenge. Despite the approaches, theories, issues, and maps that crisscross our indiscipline of inhumanity, children have not even made it into the ‘periphery’ of the ‘alternative’ of the mainstream theories presented in introductory textbooks. If I look at the most popular textbook in IR today (Baylis, Smith, and Owens 2014) there are only very light mentions of children – mostly as victims, accompanying women and the elderly. Brief examples of children in the construction of the non-combatant ‘civilian’ (Charli 2000), as part of the ‘protection myth’ and as participants in warfare can be found. But in the index there is one record for ‘youth’ and no record at all for children. Found only as occasional needles in this haystack of politics, it will be a long time before young scholars in IR can become

scholars of the young. This use of subjects in this introductory text also closely mirrors the ‘thread of victimization’ in official humanitarian discourse (Haeri and Puechguirbal 2010, 108) ‘that closely associates women with children, who, along with the elderly and the disabled are designated as being de facto “vulnerable”’. Students may encounter gender in two hours of teaching across three years of an IRs degree. There seems little point in adding children to this mix and reinforcing this association. In contrast, a final year *optional* project for politics students, on the realities and representation of child soldiers, is annually oversubscribed and typically generates informed critiques and comparisons, including by serving cadet members and former child soldiers. Creating a *separate* space for thinking about children (or gender and warfare) attracts high numbers of students wishing to centre the humanitarian or critical impulse that might have directed them to IR in the first place.

A recent introductory textbook survey of critical security studies mentions children four times in passing (Peoples and Nick 2010) and with little critical purchase, other than mentioning the co-joining of women and children as problematic – for women. Nothing new to report perhaps, although a significant amount of work has been realized and is forthcoming (Seto 2013; Jacob 2013; D’Costa, Huynh, and Katrina forthcoming). In 2005 I was invited to contribute to OUP’s *Contemporary Security Studies* textbook (Collins 2005). The first edition chapter on ‘children and war’ attempted to engage with children, childhood, and security more broadly. Subsequent manuscript reviewers stated that there was not enough about child soldiers, who should be the main, ‘humanitarian’ ‘issue’ area. ‘Child soldiers’ thus became the title and focus in two subsequent editions (2009, 2013) although all three chapters were located within a ‘broadening and deepening’ framework. Ultimately, the fact that this topic is not sufficiently taught led to its elimination of the fourth edition. I do teach about children as political bodies in my *compulsory* courses on IR theory but am increasingly aware that textbooks now act as a legitimizing device. Students are readily skeptical of the validity of children as a referent in the academy and little authority seems to present itself. Relations between political and military stake-holders, academia, educationalists, and commercial publishers clearly need to be fostered or tendered.

As Jacob argues, ‘locating the politics that determine children’s insecurity as a site for intervention is as important, if not more so, than the political influence or agency exerted by children’ (Jacob 2013, 47). Here I would argue that our non-response to children is also a symptom of the security we create. That they are undertheorized and seemingly beyond security studies is a consequence of maneuvers already made. Their security and insecurity are entwined. It is surprising that the volume of vibrant work on ‘political children’ especially in contexts of security has not yet crystallized into dedicated working groups, or a single journal or book series. This journal’s special focus is thus a welcome enterprise. Children’s vulnerabilities, agency, their future presence and absence, in practice and on paper, remain all our security challenges. Children and childhoods, then, are apt starting points for thinking about security in its totality.

Notes on contributor

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