

There's No Fighting in the War Room

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“Thinking and judging are reduced to instrumental calculation in this ‘polar night of icy darkness’ -- there is no morality, no faith, no heroism, indeed no meaning outside the market.” – Wendy Brown

“Perhaps [transgression] is like a flash of lightning in the night which, from the beginning of time, gives a dense and black intensity to the night it denies, which lights up the night from the inside, from top to bottom, yet owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation, its harrowing and poised singularity.”—Michel Foucault

I. Introduction

At the end of 2019, the UN noted a “three-fold rise on verified attacks on children” over the previous decade.¹ Despite good intentions, the creation of a more robust legal framework to protect children, and countless reports focusing on children in armed conflict, children continue to be killed, maimed, abducted, denied humanitarian access, and forced to serve in combat. International organizations have attempted to foreclose some of the worst things that happen to children in times of conflict and yet still attacks against them have tripled in the last decade.

The international body with the primary responsibility for international peace and security, the United Nations Security Council, has taken steps to protect children in armed conflict over the last decades by creating categories that thematically represent the worst abuses children experience during an armed conflict with a view to ending them. The Security Council began to look at children in armed conflict in 1999 and issued the first of a series of resolutions on the topic: Security Council Resolution 1261.² This was considered a significant indicator that concern for children’s welfare in armed conflict had arrived as an issue for policy makers. Early resolutions on children and armed conflict were broad, covering the gamut of the deleterious effects armed conflict can have on children, but they were not particularly strong resolutions. The Security Council established in Resolutions 1612 and 1539 the first strong mechanisms to deal with the problems facing children in armed conflict.³ They established a Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict as well as a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism through which State and non-State parties who had recruited child soldiers or used children in combat were explicitly named in

¹ UNICEF, Press Release, “2019 concludes a ‘deadly decade’ for children in conflict, with more than 170,000 grave violations verified since 2010” (30 December 2019), online: <https://www.unicef.org/mena/press-releases/2019-concludes-deadly-decade-children-conflict-more-170000-grave-violations-verified>.

² *Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) [on children in armed conflicts]*, UNSC, 54th Sess, UN Doc S/RES/1261 (1999) UNSC Res 1261 (1999) [*UNSC Res 1261 (1999)*].

³ *Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) [on children in armed conflict]*, UNSC, 60th Sess, UN Doc S/RES/1612 (2005) UNSC Res 1612 (2005) [*UNSC Res 1612 (2005)*] ; *Security Council resolution 1539 (2004) [on children in armed conflict]*, UNSC, 59th Sess, UN Doc S/RES/1539 (2004) UNSC Res 1539 (2004) [*UNSC Res 1539 (2004)*].

the Annex to the Secretary General's annual report.⁴ There was a mechanism established to both gather information and to produce a universal "list of shame" to be used to combat the worst dangers facing children in armed conflict. The list of shame was initially limited in scope to only naming the parties who recruited and used child soldiers. Four years later, parties who intentionally and systematically killed, maimed, or raped children were also added to the list of shame. In 2011, Security Council Resolution 1998 added parties targeting hospitals or schools to the list of shame.⁵ These are all significant measures, but I want to highlight the *sequence* of the measures. The Security Council started with voluntary and involuntary recruitment into the military, and it took four years until any other measures were taken to protect children.

The rationalizing and categorizing of potential harms children face in armed conflict was sequential, with conscription given priority. The Security Council, tasked with the maintenance of international peace and security, began the strong measures for the protection of children in armed conflict with the issue of child recruitment as opposed to the systematic killing, maiming and raping of children, or even something much more widespread such as children being denied humanitarian access, being starved, or having their homes taken from them. We are still waiting for a security council resolution prioritizing affirmative state obligations of states to accept and protect child migrants and refugees as a form of protection. Children should not be fighting wars made by adults, but there is something curious about voluntary conscription (along with forced conscription) as a priority above the many terrible involuntary things that happen to children in armed conflicts.

The appearance of children as a relevant group on the security council's agenda was a moment of configuration of childhood and it gave it a particular meaning for international security. Erica Burman has claimed that as a category, childhood functions as a "repository of social representations" defined in relation to adulthood.⁶ As a repository of meaning, the child can often represent opposing values and contradictory imagery even signifying the most extreme values and their opposites, as in pure innocence and absolute evil. Childhood is often understood in the critical literature as a relational concept, the meaning of which is derived from the context and what it is being contrasted against. Claudia Castañeda has persuasively argued that the child is potentiality, or becoming, an entity in the making.⁷ A repository of meaning that is determined in extreme and relative *future* terms, the child can be a category used for political arguments and for projecting social goods.

I have previously argued that while the child is denied agency through protective measures in times of armed conflict, childhood functions in a political contest over meanings about adulthood that are unfixed and unstable in which adult rationality is given content.⁸ I have argued that we regulate and exert control over the social world by regulating children; in a post WWII framework in which armed conflicts have not yet been eliminated despite Charter prohibitions on the use of force among states, we adults appear to be seeking collective control over conflict in the

⁴ UNSC Res 1612 (2005), *supra* note 3.

⁵ Security Council resolution 1998 (2011) [on children and armed conflict], UNSC, 66th Sess, UN Doc S/RES/1998 (1998) Res 1998 (2011).

⁶ Erica Burman, *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016) at 67.

⁷ Claudia Castañeda, *Figurations: Child, Bodies, Worlds* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) at 1.

⁸ Tanya Monforte, "Razing Child Soldiers" (2007) 27 *Alif: J Comp Poetics*, online:

<<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2009843>>.

limited ways we can exert it. In the present paper, I want to suggest that in international security, the child as a legal category works to stabilize the overlapping categories of war and peace using childhood as a wedge to split the two in a world of perpetual conflict. In short, we manage conflict by managing children.

The area of analysis, children in armed conflict, is an important topic in security studies and in international relations. The field of inquiry is frequently analyzed as a problem solvable by better legal regulation that intervenes by moving children outside of conflict as “zones of peace” away from violence.⁹ But they are not moved out of conflict zones, they are just themselves securitized. There are ways to protect children caught in conflict— as an example, state parties could prioritize humanitarian refuge to all children escaping war and ensure funding and adequate resources for IDPs –but they do not. Instead, sanctions have been created against those who perpetrate crimes against children and at the same time children are forced out of conflict as even voluntary conscription is prohibited and criminalized.

I want to suggest that the security frameworks designed by the same state parties who are the greatest manufacturers and marketers of weapons that drive conflict have constructed a system that only manages conflict rather than eliminate it. Responsibility over children’s welfare then has translated into managing the way children live and die in armed conflicts without much input from children themselves. While children’s agency is largely denied in the framework of security, understanding rationality as part of a larger framework can make the prioritization of certain adult choices more transparent. The present work will look at the political economic rationality of children in armed conflict using Foucault’s work on governmentality.¹⁰ I argue that this rationality is constitutive of the topic as a particular kind of security issue within “governmentality” in

⁹ *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children: Note by the Secretary General*, UNGA, 51st Sess, 1996, UN Doc A/51/306.

¹⁰ The lectures were given in 1978 and 1979, and there are some nascent ideas of the role of international law in the emerging process of globalization. These lectures focused in part on the emergence of an “economic” Germany during the post WWII reconstruction, with the outline of a relationship in which the interests of external parties alter the internal rationality of Germany essentially for market and security interests. But the argument that international treaties direct the will and technologies of governance of states into the international plane in a way that creates a global market, opens the door to see how states appear to disappear through the mechanisms of international treaties and global markets which are particularly interesting for the art of global governance (see Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, 1st ed by Graham Burchell, Alessandro Fontana et al, translated by Michel Senellart (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) at 54-57 [Foucault, *The Birth of Politics*]). International trade agreements and economic relationships developing within Europe and then with other nations form an important though undeveloped part of the lectures Michel Foucault (see Foucault, *The Birth of Politics*, *supra* note 10 at ch 3). Although a more complete exegesis of the role of international law in Foucault’s lectures would be useful, the present paper limits itself to taking international institutions as a given form in which governmentality operates. That is to say that states appear to be disappearing, yet through the complicated relationships of international agreements between states through treaties, the formation of treaty-based intergovernmental institutions and the emergence of networks of civil society on both the international and local levels, states exert power over and through individuals. In the end, the institutions are not the focus, but rather the analysis is directed towards the practices and the people who are governed. Foucault stated rather plainly, “Anyway, one thing clearly emerges through all these meanings [to govern], which is that one never governs a state, a territory, or a political structure. Those whom one governs are people, individuals, or groups” (see Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College De France, 1977-1978*, ed by Francois Ewald et al, translated by *Graham Burchell* (New York: Palgrave, 2009) at 122 [Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*]). Foucault claims that he does not mean to write a theory of the state, but rather a political theory of the art of government or governmental practices (see Foucault, *The Birth of Politics*, *supra* note 10 at 75-78).

Foucault's terminology, and children cannot be adequately protected by the neoliberal logic which has expanded as a system of governance. Further, we have given up on the utopic idea of eliminating conflict and are resigned to manage it. Couched in theories of economic rational choice, in conjunction with rules that manage armed conflict to protect children, children are managed by denying their agency in order to control armed conflict.

II. Investing in childhood: the child as human & social capital

Investing in young people is smart economics and crucial for effective development. Countries that produce a skilled, healthy and productive workforce are better positioned in the global economy. ... Since capacities built during youth largely determine adult outcomes, effective investments in young people provide important returns to the individual, the community and to society as a whole. With many competing demands for scarce funds, countries often do not fully recognize how critical young people are to their national economies, societies and democracies – both today and in the future – and consequently make too few public investments in programmes to harness their productive resources. ... The accumulation of human and social capital must start at a young age, as the brain develops rapidly during early childhood and adolescence. Moreover, early investment in cognitive and non-cognitive skills and health capabilities lead to enhanced investment effectiveness later on in life. As a result, building a strong foundation, through investing in programmes tailored to children and youth, advances socio-economic development.¹¹

This quote was part of a set of official talking points endorsed and distributed by the United Nations for speakers taking a UN line on global issues about a decade ago. Under the heading, "Youth," the argument makes the case for investing more resources at the national level in young people. The economized vision of youth and children represented here goes beyond a simple argument that spending resources on youth is the *right* thing to do, but rather it makes the case that in an economic calculation it is the economically optimal thing to do. As Aihwa Ong has noted, the way neo-liberalism functions internationally is complex and must be unpacked in different instances, "[t]he spread of neoliberal calculations and choices has been abetted by international agencies such as the World Bank...as an array of techniques centered on the optimization of life, neoliberalism migrates from site to site, interacting with various assemblages that cannot be analytically reduced to cases of uniform global condition of 'Neoliberalism' writ large."¹² It is not a coherent and fully encompassing logic, but the language migrates, the rationality migrates. The migration of neoliberal practices and logics that transform the ways we think about youth in relation to armed conflict are the object of inquiry.

¹¹The methodology of compiling the list of talking points on global issues was outlined as the following: "The Resources for Speakers have been designed to help you better understand ...the work that is being carried out by the United Nations ... They have been contributed by various United Nations organizations, using the most recent statistics and official reports." (UN Resources for Speakers on Global Issues, Topic: Youth, briefing papers)

¹² Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) at 14.

As neo-liberal practices migrate from one site to another, childhood is being recast and reimagined within a neo-liberal imagery. Take as an example the way childhood is being recast in the following line from the 2011 *World Development Report* from the World Bank on the impact of violence on children, “In countries where children have been brutalized as victims or witnesses of violence, or worse yet, as perpetrators by being coerced to be child combatants, the lasting trauma and lost human and social capital become an impediment to future social progress.”¹³ Seen as human potential generally, but cast in economic terms, children are read as human and social capital, or worse, when in contact with violence they are viewed as “lost” capital. The harm done to the child by violence is calculable in terms of the lost income he or she would be able to generate in the future.

Foucault attributed the theory of human capital, as a key concept that permits economic analysis to migrate to previously non-economic areas of life.¹⁴ In his account, the particularly American contribution to neo-liberalism was taking the idea of society as enterprise to an extreme through the concept of human capital. By theorizing the value added by labor not in a static equation defined in terms of time, but in terms of innovation and enterprise, Foucault argues that the neo-liberals posit labor itself as the central variable for understanding the progress of nations.¹⁵ Capital becomes anything that returns an income, so capital-ability is the income one is capable of earning. The worker then “appears as a sort of enterprise for himself” so that society is made up not of persons, but of enterprise-units.¹⁶ The theory of human capital is a theory of the entrepreneurial-self where even consumption becomes a productive activity because one produces satisfaction in the self.

The idea of human capital allows for activities previously understood as non-economic, such as a mother spending time with her child, be translated into an economic rationality. That is to say that time spent with a child translates into greater human capital and more earning power for the future worker. The concept of human capital is important as a neo-liberal governmental practice because although other theories of political economy, including Marx’s, extend an economic grid to previously non-economic realms of life, it is the apparent neutrality within the concept of human capital that makes it particularly neo-liberal.¹⁷ That is to say that it imposes a way of evaluating what appears neutral because it imports verifiability. So the amount of time a mother *should* spend with her child can be evaluated based on a cost benefits calculation. Once this activity is rendered rational and calculable, evaluations based on tradition, love, need or instinct become provincial or even nonsensical.

The concept of human capital assists in the practice of governing in a way that services the needs of the market without intervening in the market directly. It takes the market as the source of veridiction for cost benefits analysis and as such compels societies and individuals to make decisions based on market needs. Gearing human knowledge to the truth or falseness of the market means that human needs get tied to development analysis. That is human development then meets the needs of an expanding market, or rather it helps expand and develop a market, so states are directed to invest in their human populations to meet the needs of the market rather than the other

¹³ World Bank, *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development* (2011) at 88–89.

¹⁴ Foucault, *The Birth of Politics*, *supra* note 10 at 227–233.

¹⁵ *Ibid* at 215–233.

¹⁶ *Ibid* at 225.

¹⁷ Wendy Brown, “Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy” (2003) 7:1 *Theory & Event*.

way around. Human capital as a theory helps to perfect or drive the biopolitical practices to extremes. As forming part of biopolitical practices of governments, it marries the concepts of the market and populations and makes the regulation of markets through the manipulations of populations apparent. What is of particular interest is that it is precisely the youth that are most frequently referred to in such brutally economic terms as a kind of social capital. The investment in children is argued fully in terms of potentiality. They are seen as potential adults, potential citizens and a potential workforce. There is a double instrumentalization of children in the sense that even education, one of the most important social goods historically provided for young people for their benefit, is given as an investment for adults in children as future adults and again as future human capital in order to perfect the human enterprise. The youth are not only social capital – they are *potential* social capital.

Failing to invest in children and youth triggers substantial economic, social, and political costs. ...Negative outcomes resulting from misaligned investment strategies include truncated human and social capital accumulation (e.g. school drop-out, poor labor market entry) and negative conduct (e.g. substance abuse, crime and violence, risky sexual behaviors). ...These outcomes and the resulting underutilization of human resources are costly for the individual and society, ...For instance, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, early school drop-out, or unemployment can be associated with lower economic production and lower lifetime earnings.¹⁸

In the attempt to rationalize all conduct of a government, children and youth are made into targets of investment strategies so that all life activities can be translated into this economic grid and the future earning power of the individual. Even the contraction of AIDS is cast as a loss in terms of “lower lifetime earnings.” It may be an objectively true, evidence-based statement that the contraction of AIDS without adequate treatment will lead to lower lifetime earnings, but this is presented as a value-neutral discourse. Inside this logic, it is nonsensical to even argue that the representation of humans as capital represents a loss, since the loss is intangible and outside a verifiable or market evaluation. Once policy makers believe that only evidence-based statements are useful for the art of government, then it becomes more difficult to argue outside this frame or to dislodge this knowledge-power.

It is not simply the World Bank that economizes human potential. Through the concept of human capital, the supposedly neutral economization of human life is spread across the board, migrating into other agencies and becomes part of the UN position on youth. That is not to say that the United Nations as an institution, or UNICEF, or whatever particular entity represents a neo-liberal ideology. In fact, the individual agencies are quite heterodox internally and across the UN. However, there are traces of political ideologies moving from one site to another in the international institutions as practices and as ways of knowing. The concept of human capital requires a different epistemology underpinned by the economic grid that includes different ways to assess normative claims. The concept of education as a way to increase human capital displaces other conceptions of education such as education for citizenship, or for moral or spiritual enrichment, or education as joy as an end in itself. Education is not only transformed into education for the purpose of fitting into a job market, but the young person is also transformed within this

¹⁸ Kevin Hempel & Wendy Cunningham, “Investing in your country’s children and youth today: Good policy, smart economics” (2020) IV:1 Child & Youth Development Notes, The World Bank 1 at 2.

epistemic universe. The income one will be capable of earning becomes a defining quality of the young person, and perhaps *the* defining quality for good global governance. Investment in children is an investment in human and social capital. The question of children's agency then gets subsumed into a larger social issue and instrumentalization of the person is not subtle in the concept of human capital.

Bringing this back to the issue of children and armed conflict, children are central to conflict in various ways. The child is often represented in international relations as a uniquely vulnerable subject. But vulnerability is a dubious concept. It shows both the marginality of a subject as well as its centrality. The child is considered to be one of the most vulnerable subjects during conflict not only because children are differently or especially dependent on adults and societal structures for their lives and wellbeing, but also because they are at times central to the aims of armed conflict. Children, like women, are often seen as the base of a population. That is to say, the biological aspect of the child as the fruit of reproduction and the future of society can make them targets. As the future of a nation, when they are killed, they are not merely collateral damage or unintended casualties, as they are often called, but they are sometimes directly targeted during conflict and even in times of peace by violent acts for their symbolic value. As Marc Sommers, writing in a paper commissioned by the World Bank has noted, "Unfortunately, although children may be 'incidental victims of armed warfare' whose war experience may have been momentary, children are more commonly caught in wars where 'an aggressor specifically tries to maim, kill, and spiritually destroy the enemies' children'"¹⁹ That is, since children, like women, are seen as the biological foundations of a population, their destruction is sometimes central to the conduct of war. Children do not need to carry a gun to die by one.

Young people are linked to the future in a unique way. As the World Bank noted, "... a major episode of violence, unlike natural disasters or economic cycles, can wipe out an entire generation of economic progress... And violence begets violence: male children who witness abuses have a higher tendency to perpetrate violence later in life."²⁰ Children are cast as a societal fulcrum. As potentiality, children represent the extremes of humanity as vessels for the dreams and nightmares of adults. As human and social potential, children are both potentially socially productive and peaceful, and also potentially terrifyingly dangerous. "In countries where children have been brutalized as victims or witnesses of violence, or, worse yet, as perpetrators by being coerced to be child combatants, the lasting trauma and lost human and social capital become an impediment to future social progress."²¹ When children are cast as human and social capital, the notion that children are central to the welfare of the nation is made more apparent and in fact quantifiable and manageable. The translation of childhood into a hyper-rationalized, economic field gives economically minded policymakers reasons for investing in children and staving off the potential for danger.

¹⁹ Marc Sommers, "Children, Education and War: Reaching EFA Objectives in Countries Affected by Conflict" (2002) World Bank, Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit Working Paper No 1 at 8 (citing Roberta J Apfel & Bennett Simon, *Minefields in Their Hearts: The Mental Health of Children in War and Communal Violence* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996) at 5.).

²⁰ World Bank, *supra* note 13 at 6.

²¹ *Ibid* at 89.

III. The Economic Rationale for War and Peace

In what follows, I put forward the argument that children are used as market levers to control and regulate conflict within an economic rationality in order to produce an efficient outcome that secures the global market. Simultaneously, decision-making is located away from individuals such as children who are most affected by conflict.²² Since Clausewitz onwards, the line that war is the pursuit of state interests and a form of rationality in itself has been fairly well established. But a variation of the democratic peace thesis in liberal international relations theory proposes the antithetical argument that reason can overcome irrational drives to conflict. A more recent body of literature suggests that it is in fact capitalism that accounts for states not going to war with one another rather than the democratic forms. I want to investigate the relationship between the arguments made in the capitalist peace theory relative to children in armed conflict. I will demonstrate that rational choice theory is particularly myopic to the ways in which economic logics work at different levels of the global marketplace to produce and then regulate conflict.

A. *Markets make peace*

In the field of international relations, the capitalist peace theory²³ makes the case that there are “pacifying effects of commerce and economic freedom, of trade and capitalism,” stating quite confidently that “Free markets promote peace.”²⁴ There are different explanations for the mechanisms within capitalism which are supposed to promote peace such as interdependence or higher levels of prosperity that increase levels of opportunity costs.²⁵ What remains stable in the various versions is that the pursuit of individual self-interest has become a universal form of rationality in pursuit of economic prosperity, which drives the project. Under many of the contemporary theories, at the level of analysis of the international system, there is an economic grid that has peace and economic development on one side and war and underdevelopment on the other. The empirical research agenda is to prove the argument of capitalist peace that rational choice dictates an interest in peace as it leaves everyone better off. A sub argument here is that war is more costly than trading through open markets which is cheaper and more efficient.

International organizations have pursued the strategy of making the argument that states should opt for peace based on an economic calculation. The 2011 *World Development Report* from the World Bank entitled “Conflict, Security and Development” makes the case that war constitutes the opposite of development.²⁶ Conflict and violence are framed as irrational and based

²² It has to be affirmed that it is reprehensible when children fight in wars. This is especially the case when they are forced into combat and the impacts of active combat on children are often horrific even when voluntary, but the impact of conflict on children is itself the horror that underlies desperate choices and it is difficult to see the rationality of youth as significantly different from that of adults. Child combatants often make rational calculations similar to those of adults when deciding to enter a conflict (see especially Jason Hart, “The Politics of ‘Child Soldiers’” (2006) 13:1 *Brown J World Affairs* 217).

²³ Generally in these theories, capitalism is equated with “free markets or smaller governments at home and abroad” (see Tim Krieger & Daniel Meierrieks, “The rise of capitalism and the roots of anti-American terrorism” (2015) 52:1 *J Peace Research* 46 at 48).

²⁴ Erich Weede, “The Capitalist Peace and the Rise of China: Establishing Global Harmony by Economic Interdependence” (2010) 36:2 *Intl Interactions* 206 at 211.

²⁵ See e.g. Michael Mousseau, “Coming to Terms with the Capitalist Peace” (2010) 36:2 *International Interactions* 185; Erik Gartzke, “The Capitalist Peace” (2007) 51:1 *Am J Political Science* 166; Weede, *supra* note 24.

²⁶ World Bank *supra* note 13.

on identity politics or new nationalisms that are founded on communal commitments, while peace is framed as part of a rational choice calculation that furthers state interests. The World Bank Report does not merely state that violence and conflict are irrational, it fills over 300 pages with graphs and statistics showing the economic irrationality of violence and conflict. The decision between conflict and peace is translated into an economic calculation to appeal to rational actors tasked with upholding the best interests of states.

Going back to the issue of children as armed combatants in conflict, there is strong evidence that when they are active combatants conflicts go on longer and are more destructive.²⁷ Certainly peace advocates will use whatever tools of argumentation at their disposal to push for peace. The use of economic arguments for peace says less about those making the case than it does about the nature of the system we work within. Perhaps one of the most striking translations of human experience into a neoliberal register refers to the benefits of peace in terms of “dividends.” UNICEF Executive Director, Carol Bellamy, lamenting that donor funding for education and reintegration programs for child soldiers had dried up, stated that education is one of “the dividends of peace.” She argued, “If we can’t show proof of the dividends of peace to children, how can we prove the dividends of peace to adults...?”²⁸ Agencies frame their arguments to fit into a market logic for funders who speak in an economics jargon. The phrase the “dividends of peace,” much like the often-used terminology of youth as “social capital,” or the reference to people who will be impacted by a policy as “stakeholders” have become the norm in UN documents. Perhaps it is merely phrasing, but in a field increasingly dominated by an economic logic, it is not shocking that peace is being re-packaged in an economic logic as dividends to meet the needs of donors or the needs of markets.

The argument for or against war based on the rationality of the action due to economic calculations is part of the new liberal theory of the political economics of war and peace. Peace is rational and war is irrational. But the discourse of the political economy of war and peace has particular features as a development discourse. Although economic considerations have always been part of arguments for and against conflict, what may be new is the totalizing nature of economic considerations as a way to evaluate the value of peace. Expanding on these arguments, if the market is a site of veridiction, then to critique the decisions of states against an economic grid places the legitimacy of states with weak economies into question as rational actors *a priori*. Indeed, some proponents of the capitalist peace thesis are quite explicit about the market as a site of veridiction in relation to development even referring to underdevelopment as “backwardness”; as Erich Weede wrote, “The catch-up process of poor countries depends on the exploitation of the advantages of backwardness.”²⁹ This development of states maps onto the development of children. Cannella and Viruru have argued that “childhood can be examined as a colonizing construct”; representation imposed on the young in relation to adults can be “oppressive, controlling, and even colonizing.”³⁰ They mapped their insights in child development onto larger international relationships among peoples and states, arguing that the discourses of social and

²⁷ Peter W Singer, *Children at War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Guy S Goodwin-Gill & Ilene Cohn, *Child Soldiers: The Role of Children in Armed Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

²⁸ “Future of former child soldiers in Sierra Leone at risk - UNICEF”, *UN News Centre* (22 July 2003), online: <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2003/07/74962>>.

²⁹ Erich Weede, “Geopolitics, Institutions, and Economics” (2016) 8:1 *Geopolitics, History, and Int’l Rel.* 177-220 at 186.

³⁰ Gaile Sloan Cannella & Radhika Viruru, *Childhood and Postcolonization: Power, Education, and Contemporary Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2004) at 83–84.

economic “development” similarly turn on the value of rationality and so are paternalistic, reinforcing geopolitical hierarchies and oppressive practices. Foucault proposed that the neoliberal rationality assists in economic and efficiency calculations to permeate all areas of life.³¹ The arguments against conflict and for peace are normatively determined based on the rationality or irrationality of the economic choice. The real neoliberal turn then is to make every actor aware of the economic calculation and refit their own choices based in this logic. And herein lies the paradox: as each individual actor is turned into a neoliberal subject for foreign policy, there is little attention paid to how they evaluate cases in which economic interests may in fact favor conflict.

B. Markets make war

Some versions of the capitalist peace theory concede that the general line that conflict is irrational doesn’t capture the totality of all possibilities and economic rationality might make conflict a rational decision in some contexts and there is an already established literature explaining the political economic causes of conflict that the capitalist peace theory was intended to counter.³² There are many instances in which especially internal group interests may make conflict more likely. As one example, “coups become more likely because elites make the rational decision that the costs associated with a risky coup are offset by the expected utility of the attempt.”³³ Many of the conflicts today are internal conflicts in which different factions are fighting for control over the resources of the territory, including the natural resources of a country. The conflict is both over and financed by the resources of a nation.³⁴ Although society as a whole, especially those that internalize the costs of conflict on the youth into their calculations, do not benefit from conflict, many individuals and some groups most definitely do benefit economically by war.

Market forces also structure conflict not by eliminating it, but by locating it at the periphery of the global market. The framing of economic self-interest as a universal rationality enables or, probably more accurately stated, produces an economic system which displaces the conditions for conflict to an elsewhere through a process of remaking subjectivities. What I mean by this is that the celebration of the profit-seeking individual and the profit-seeking state as the universal model for rationality has raised war profiteering to a new level of legitimacy while simultaneously denying the rationality of war. This pushes the conflict to the outside of the core of economic interests. For example, French Prime Minister Macron met with Saudi Arabia in 2022 and secured a \$19 billion dollar arms contract that was widely celebrated. Not only are these deals made by heads of state, but the legitimacy of a public individual selling arms for a country’s private industry as an official part of state craft has become so normalized that when countries like Sweden do not

³¹ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2010) *supra* note 10; Weede, *supra* note 29 at 196 (For an example of this, take Weede’s argument in respect of migration from the Balkans, Africa and “Muslim” countries in which he writes, “If migrants bring little human capital along, they must be a burden on host societies. It is hardly conceivable that home countries which suffer from poverty, political instability, civil war, or repression educate their emigrants in such a way that they become easily employable in more highly developed countries” at 196).

³² See e.g. C Cramer, “Homo Economicus Goes to War: Methodological Individualism Rational Choice and the Political Economy of War” (2002) 30:11 *World Development* 1845; Paul Collier & A Hoeffler, “On the economic causes of civil war” (1998) 50:4 *Oxford Econ Papers* 563; Ismael Hossein-Zadeh, *The political economy of U.S. militarism*, 10th ed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

³³ Jonathan Powell & Mwita Chacha, “Investing in stability: Economic interdependence, coups d’état, and the capitalist peace” (2016) 53:4 *J Peace Research* 525 at 528.

³⁴ See e.g. Michael G Findley & Josiah F Marineau, “Lootable resources and third-party intervention into civil wars” (2015) 32:5 *Conflict Management & Peace Science* 465.

aggressively seek out military contracts, they are chided in foreign policy news for failure to promote their domestic arms industries.³⁵ In the meantime, Italy took the decision to halt arms sales to Saudi Arabia; the U.S. had also pulled back its arms support after internal debate began when it became clear that the Saudi government was targeting civilians, including children in Yemen.³⁶ The temporary ban on weapons sales was lifted and the U.S. decided only to sell defensive weapons until the completion of an inquiry.³⁷ The U.S. has a lot to lose if they pull out of the Saudi agreement in which they had promised \$64.1 billion in weapons over a 5 year period.³⁸ The competition between states to sell weapons appears to trump considerations of morality as some states step back, others step in. Trade in the defense industry is economically significant in developed nations as the flow of arms is frequently from developed to developing nations. The U.S., France, and China are the top three arms exporters globally but exports from France have risen dramatically in recent years as the exports from China have dropped.³⁹ The fact that we discuss defense as its own industry is itself significant. Hossein-Zadeh puts it forcefully in relation to the United States arms industry which is aligned with defense companies that are privately owned but publicly curated as “market-driven”; this alignment produces the conditions of “imperial wars and demand for arms” which he argues, “are nowadays precipitated more by sales and/or profits than the other way around.”⁴⁰ Unlike nuclear weapons, conventional weapons are designed to be used and so it is difficult to ignore the conclusion of these activities that it is profitable to make war possible around the world even if it were to hold true that countries with more “open” economies engaged less in conflict at least on their own soil. It is in France’s economic interests that Saudi Arabia buys their weapons, and within a realist lens, Saudi Arabia’s economic interests are bolstered by a geopolitical interest in hegemonic control of the region which requires destroying Yemeni resistance no matter what that does to Yemeni children. By late 2021, over 10,000 children had been killed or maimed in Yemen since the conflict escalated in 2015.⁴¹ Despite the horrific, unimaginable suffering of children, war continues to pay for some while the pursuit of self-interest as an economic logic can rationalize these decisions.

There is a complex political economy of conflict that goes beyond business interests as private industries align with statecraft. I have to question the soundness of the empirical research that proposes that countries with more open economies do not engage in conflict. While this short piece cannot offer a complete refutation of the empirical work, I can simply point to what appears like a sleight of hand when counting conflicts rather than military interventions. I would be

³⁵ Elisabeth Braw, “Why Can’t Sweden Sell Its Fighter Jets?” *Foreign Policy* (25 Aug 2022), online: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/08/25/sweden-gripen-sell-export-fighter-jets/> (She writes: “Since the end of the Cold War, the Swedish government has mostly been putting defense exports in the hands of the globalized market. But with other countries’ leaders pitching their companies to governments now investing more in defense, it’s a flawed strategy”).

³⁶ Bruce Riedel, “It’s Time to Stop US Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia”, *The Brookings Institution* (4 February 2021), online: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/its-time-to-stop-us-arms-sales-to-saudi-arabia/>.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Press Release, “Global Arms Trade Falls Slightly, but Imports to Europe, East Asia, and Oceania Rise” (14 March 2022), online: [https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2022/global-arms-trade-falls-slightly-imports-europe-east-asia-and-oceania-rise#:~:text=\(Stockholm%2014%20March%202022\),Oceania%20\(%2B59%20per%20cent\)](https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2022/global-arms-trade-falls-slightly-imports-europe-east-asia-and-oceania-rise#:~:text=(Stockholm%2014%20March%202022),Oceania%20(%2B59%20per%20cent).).

⁴⁰ Hossein-Zadeh, *supra* note 32 at 6.

⁴¹ Geneva Palais, UNICEF, Press Release, “‘Shameful Milestone’ in Yemen as 10,000 Children Killed or Maimed Since Fighting Began” (19 October 2021), online: <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/shameful-milestone-yemen-10000-children-killed-or-maimed-fighting-began>.

interested to see the empirical data and see if the U.S. and coalition force invasion of Iraq or the interventions in Afghanistan or other countries are counted. Military interventions from developed nations appear to disappear or are rendered invisible in the conflict calculation as the interventions happens on the soil of “other” nations. They appear almost as police operations and are argued to be “pacifying” forces in some of the literature.⁴² Rather than disproving the thesis, military interventions by developed nations are used to make the case that these interventions cut short what could be otherwise prolonged conflicts.⁴³ That may in fact be the case as overwhelming military force can end a conflict more quickly, but it is still a military intervention.

Returning now to the relationship of children as social capital and security, we see how children are managed as zones of peace during an armed conflict and this fits into a security logic that looks for pacifying levers of power. What began as a designation to protect children has become a social resource to control conflict. In an interview Radhika Coomeraswamy, the Special Rapporteur for children in armed conflict, stated that schools must also be a “zone of peace.”⁴⁴ Children and schools are united as inviolate and as such become secure zones. It is significant that the site of refuge for children cannot be the home in this model, and the site of refuge, historically a church or holy place, is now the schoolyard.

The arguments to provide an education to children or move them into schools are sometimes straightforward acts of social engineering. There is a value in moving children from battlefields to schoolyards that in the barest sense is protecting them and of course it enriches their lives. But when absorbed into a security logic, schools not only get children out of harm’s way, but they also drain the war machine of potential recruits. As the report for Save the Children has noted, “Attending school or receiving vocational education services provides children and adolescents with a much-needed daily activity. With less time on their hands, they are too busy to engage in anti-social behaviour; ... ‘When children learn a trade, that will keep them busy; it won’t give them the opportunity to go and get involved in conflict’ (footnote omitted).”⁴⁵ Investing in childhood, as described by the World Bank, makes the child-future citizen one who better meets the overall needs of the global market and keeps the global market functioning.

Unfortunately, making children so blatantly part of the program to manage conflict has costs. In Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. used education as part of their “hearts and minds” campaigns, as part of a military strategy for defeating insurgents using aid as an incentive to transform mindsets.⁴⁶ When education becomes contentious politically or part of military strategy, schools are targeted. It is sometimes difficult to disentangle the assistance from the bodies offering assistance. Designating schools as zones of peace for the Security Council followed the targeting of U.S. funded schools which educate girls. In a UNESCO report, it was found that the “securitization of aid” has made aid workers – as well as schools, teachers, and students – potentially more vulnerable to attack by insurgent groups as the merging of development aid and

⁴² Powell & Chacha, *supra* note 33.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ “Schools in Middle East Must be ‘Zones of Peace’ UN Envoy on Children Conflict”, *UN News* (12 April 2007), online: <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2007/04/215342>>.

⁴⁵ Joanna Wedge, *Where Peace Begins: Education’s role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding* (London: International Save the Children Alliance, 2008) at 12.

⁴⁶ Stuart Gordon, *Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship Between Aid and Security in Afghanistan’s Helmand Province* (Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 2011).

military security projects have increased around schools.⁴⁷ Although schools are designated as zones of peace, and they are not a legitimate military targets, their prominence as visible secure zones may perversely contribute to the targeting of schools in some conflicts.⁴⁸

In contrast to the drive to get children out of the military in developing nations and into schools, the reverse is the case in developed nations which need to draw them directly from schools into the military. Under international law, children can be recruited but just not deployed until they are of age. Governments in the Global North may resist the use of child soldiers when they face them on the battlefield, but recruitment practices rely on capturing youth for military service while they are still young.

Across the United States, but disproportionately in low-income areas, military recruiting officers often have direct access to schools: Military academies, strategically placed recruiting stations and school rallies all form part of a concerted effort to recruit under-aged and often underprivileged youth.⁴⁹ It is precisely because the U.S. military wants to recruit young people while still in school that the U.S. was resistant to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.⁵⁰ In the UK there is evidence that child recruits into the UK armed forces suffer worse outcomes in terms of death and trauma than adult recruits.⁵¹ As the former Ambassador and delegate to the United Nations Michael Southwick noted, in order to meet desired force levels, the U.S. needs to conscript seventeen-year-olds before they leave school and “drift off to other activities.”⁵² Economic anxiety makes the military a good economic option for young people in the Global North. Southwick has observed that “the military is sacred in American society”⁵³ and I would argue that reverence provides cover for the ways a degree of economic precarity is critical for feeding the military machine in the U.S. Children cannot fight in wars, but it is optimal to pull them in before they become adults. Conflict is managed through the management of children. In well-functioning wars there is a logic of well-functioning markets: developed economies intervene enough to keep the global economic machine moving as children are moved to the legally constructed outside of conflict and using just the right amount of precarity to keep them primed to be fed into the military machine for future use.

This does nothing, however, in re-allocating resources in many versions of the capitalist peace thesis, as the individual is made responsible for their success or failure in the market. Individualizing power is a technique that regulates conflict and the market efficiently but does not eliminate it, as economic inequality remains and remains a cause of conflict.⁵⁴ “The fundamental objective of governmentality will be mechanisms of security, or let’s say, it will be state

⁴⁷ Mario Novelli, “Political violence against education sector aid workers in conflict zones: A preliminary investigation into the possible link between attacks and the Increased Merging of Security and Development Policy” in *Protecting Education from Attack* (Paris: UNESCO, 2010) at 71.

⁴⁸ Margit van Wessel & Ruud van Hirtum, “Schools as Tactical Targets in Conflict: What the Case of Nepal Can Teach Us” (2013) 57:1 Comparative Education Rev 1.

⁴⁹ Majia Holmer Nadesan, *Governing Childhood into the 21st Century: Biopolitical Technologies of Childhood Management and Education*, 1st ed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) at 108.

⁵⁰ Michael Southwick, “Political Challenges behind the Implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of a Child” (2004) 37:3 Cornell Intl LJ 541 at 543.

⁵¹ Rhianna Louise, Christina Hunter & Sally Zlowitz, *The Recruitment of Children by the UK Armed Forces: A Critique from Health Professionals* (London: Medact, 2016).

⁵² Southwick, *supra* note 50 at 543.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Wedge, *supra* note 45 at 13.

intervention with the essential function of ensuring the security of the natural phenomena of economic processes or processes intrinsic to population.”⁵⁵ It is not about redistribution, but about social engineering to create economic spaces for individuals. In the end, the rules and interventions do just enough to secure the market, and certainly not enough to protect children as attacks against them continue to escalate.

IV. Conclusion

In an imperfect world, we try to protect what we can the only ways that appear available. This short comment is not intended to deride the work of activists who are doing the hard work of piecing together protections where they can find them in the midst of incomprehensible horrors. I do not want to suggest that children are only seen as social capital to the actors working on their behalf, but rather to lay out how the overall field has been constituted and emphasize the constraint advocates themselves are also facing as children are securitized. I imagine that making arguments in economic terms is simply the most logical way to get states to pay for children’s schooling. But it remains extraordinary that child rights advocates are continuously in a position to beg for funds for the basic necessities when funds continue to flow freely to war machines.

War has not been stopped by Charter prohibitions nor by a capitalist peace. Although war profiteering has always existed, the economic logics of the day have institutionalized, legitimized, and even championed individual subjects seeking their own economic interests at the expense of the lives of others. Capitalism doesn’t create peace, and at most what may be supported by evidence is that capitalism displaces conflict to the margins of a global economy. Fighting is often displaced to other spaces, outside the core economic nations to the periphery for the benefit of weapons companies and GDPs while children are forced to sit outside the rooms where these decisions are made. There is a political economy of conflict with strong economic incentives that produce war. With war all around, rather than deny the rationality of youth who sometimes choose to take part in the economy of war, we should endeavor to understand what their choices signal. Against a backdrop of unimaginable suffering, if children elect to fight in an armed conflict, then this act should be read as the transgression it is –one that illuminates the darkness we have created.

⁵⁵ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, *supra* note 10 at 353.