Children, Civilianhood and Humanitarian Securitization

Lorraine Macmillan

Abstract

In this paper, the influence of the construction of children as civilians over the processes of securitization in the US intervention in Somalia is examined. This is done through an analysis of the US print news media coverage of that event. The study employs two key theoretical frameworks: the first is the social understanding of civilianhood; and the second is the Copenhagen School's theory of securitization. The work concludes that a failure to unpack the value of referent objects of security diminishes the insights that securitization theory can offer. The grammar of securitizing moves cannot be fully comprehended in instances of militarized humanitarian interventions, in particular, without this kind of analysis. Children as suffering civilians draw considerable attention from the world's media and thus an investigation of their role in securitization can be highly informative.

Introduction

The importance of children to the world of international relations has grown markedly in the last three decades. Their heightened salience is amply demonstrated by the near universal adoption of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the advocacy work from which it sprang. In the world of practice, an increasing number of development and post-conflict reconstruction programmes make children their chief concern. The world's media expose us to countless images of suffering children which remain the leitmotif of emergency relief fund-raising campaigns.[1] Unconventionally fought civil wars in which civilians are disproportionately affected provide a prodigious amount of such imagery. However, the current media coverage of Syria proves that conventional weaponry when targeted at civilians can produce equally shocking representations of children's suffering.

Despite the added attention children have attracted, scholarship on children and security is still scant. A small cohort of scholars engage with the security issues children present but their collective output is small and often appears on the fringes. Consequently there is insufficient theorization of children's role's in security. This paper, as part of this special issue, seeks to partially address that deficiency. In it, the influence of the construction of children as civilians over the processes of securitization is examined. This is achieved through an analysis of the US print news media coverage of the US humanitarian intervention

---

[1] Burman, 1994.

in Somalia in the early 1990s. The study employs two key theoretical frameworks: the first is the social understanding of civilianhood; and the second is the Copenhagen School's theory of securitization. The work concludes that a failure to unpack the value of referent objects of security diminishes the insights that securitization theory can offer. The grammar of securitizing moves cannot be fully comprehended in instances of militarized humanitarian interventions, in particular, without this kind of analysis. Children as suffering civilians draw considerable attention from the world's media and thus an investigation of their role in securitization has something to teach us.

The paper begins with a brief overview of the US intervention in Somalia, explaining how it constituted an extraordinary measure for the US at the time and how, in addition, it is atypical of traditional subject matter for securitization theorists. A first reading of the public discourse on Somalia carried in several dozen US newspapers follows. Insights from Kinsella's genealogy of the social construction of civilianhood provide a useful starting point for a second reading of the newspaper texts. The second reading sketches the role played by constructions of child civilians in the securitization and desecuritization of the Somali war. Concluding comments highlight shortcomings in securitization theory that the analysis reveals.

The Somali Civil War

The civil war that erupted in Somalia in 1991 quickly gave rise to a humanitarian disaster on a monumental scale. Exacerbated by drought, famine engulfed large swathes of the country. Internal as well as international displacements of refugees were estimated at two million. "By 1992, almost 4.5 million people, more than half the total number in the country, were threatened with starvation, severe malnutrition and related diseases," the UN reported.[2] It was said on Capitol Hill that one quarter of the population under five years of age had perished by mid year.[3] Intense media coverage and mobilisation of global civil society groups such as the International Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières were followed by mobilisation at governmental level. With support from over thirty nations, the UN embarked on a humanitarian relief mission (UNOSOM I) succeeded by militarised humanitarian intervention of a decidedly muscular kind (UNITAF, UNOSOM II) intended to create peace and stability and rebuild the Somali state and economy. UNITAF was sanctioned by the UN Security Council under a chapter VII mandate (resolution 794) but the multinational force came under US command as the supplier of 80 percent of troops, twenty five thousand in

[2] UN Dept of Peacekeeping, 1997. See also USA Today, 1992.
[3] Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 1992b.

number. UNITAF was charged with the task of facilitating aid delivery using "all necessary means."

The humanitarian intervention took on particular significance in US public discourse in part because the country had long been a space in which superpower rivalry had played out. Otherwise the country was of little strategic importance.[4] President Siad Barre had utilised this rivalry to extract aid and thus maintain a 21-year long period of office in which a large degree of coercion was exercised, garnering a reputation for excessive force for his clan. Their "terror tactics included the indiscriminate slaughter of civilians, mutilating opponents' faces and burning their genitals with acid," it was reported.[5] On his demise, his followers laid "a deadly web of more than 100,000 mines" in gardens, refugee camps and roadsides.[6] His eventual fall from power in the absence of superpower support contributed to political destabilisation and the collapse of the Somali state shortly afterwards. The power vacuum left behind was colonised by a cohort of 'warlords.' Despite US confidence that the simplicity of Somali materiel and warfighting methods would guarantee their success, Somalia became the setting of an ignominious encounter with a local warlord and his cohort.[7] The loss of life was pivotal to the superpower's effective withdrawal subsequently. Notwithstanding its success in averting continued famine, the failure of the multilateral mission to extract Somalia from the grips of warlordism and conflict undermined the UN's reputation and put into question the feasibility of robust peacekeeping operations.[8] Furthermore, the humiliating defeat of US forces was to have negative repercussions for the likelihood of the superpower participating directly in similar ventures again.[9] The loss of life among Pakistani and US peacekeepers exposed the folly of assumptions prevalent at the time of the pacific nature of the post-cold war global order.[10]

The US intervention in Somalia constitutes an example of securitization, albeit an unusual one. For the Copenhagen School, securitization occurs when an issue becomes linked to security and is promoted beyond the realm of normal politics through the 'speech acts' made by significant 'securitizing' actors. In the zone of exceptional politics where the issue is debated, there is a true openness to possibilities, a feature normal politics does not display to the same extent. Securitization theorists are mostly occupied with issues that occur *within or*

---

[4] Washington Post, 1992d. Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 1992a.
[5] Atlanta Journal and Constitution, 1992.
[6] Associated Press, 1991.
[7] New York Times, 1992c.
[8] St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 1992. Reuters News, 1993c.
[9] All Things Considered, 1993.
[10] Washington Post, 1992d. New York Times, 1992a. Boston Globe, 1992.

impact on the state. The referent objects of the security issues they examine involve existential level threats to, for example, the citizenry, military forces or environment of the state. Militarized humanitarian interventions deviate from this form because the referent object of security is a foreign population beyond the boundaries of the state. Even if existential threat to large numbers of foreigners outside the state can be shown, the issue does not normally give rise to securitization. Existential threat to the state or its constituent parts (citizenry, political structures, way of life, etc.) as a consequence of this must be evident. Although no US strategic interests were threatened by war in Somalia, arguably, President George HW Bush's ideas for a new world order and the US place within it were at stake if the country did not act. One could also argue that US self identity as guardian of the new world order was at risk. Apart from existential threat, there were other respects in which Somalia constituted a securitization for the US, in the way in which it exceeded normal politics, for example. There was sufficient reluctance in Washington to involvement which considerable debate between Bush, his National Security Council, the Pentagon and others was needed to overcome. The death of 241 Marines in Beirut in 1983 and a new military doctrine advocating overwhelming (and therefore expensive) force deployment in such situations were only some of the problems to be resolved if intervention were to go ahead.

Of course, much has been made of the influence of humanitarian organizations and the media on the outcome of that debate although this remains contested. Reports of overwhelming suffering were said to have helped Bush decide on intervention and were important in drumming up pressure from the American public, from the UN and abroad. Of all lives to be saved, the US and its public were entreated to come to the aid of a specific group – children – not simply a monolithic block of civilians. Official and grass roots humanitarian organizations mirrored the media's elevation of children's plight.[11] Assistant Administrator for the US Agency for International Development (USAID) told the House Select Committee on Hunger that "the real tragedy was that of the starving Somali children."[12] Politicians were alive to the publicity surrounding children's plight and apparently motivated by it. Lawrence Eagleburger, acting US Secretary of State at the time, has said that in addition to substantial pressures from Congress, the US President, George Bush, was driven to act by "pictures of those starving kids."[13] Assuming that there is at least some truth to this claim, then it is important to understand the prominence of constructions of the suffering of child civilians in the discourse and how these structured the field of meaning. This is the matter to which the paper now turns.

---

[11] Labonte, 2013, p. 82.
[12] Lofland, 2002, p. 54.
[13] Glanville, 2005, p. 4.

US public discourse: A first reading

The American-led intervention guaranteed that the western media would be particularly heavily involved in covering the crisis and in maintaining Somalia at the top of the media agenda.[14] The result is a large stock of articles in the print news media, numbering several thousand. For the discourse analysis that follows, a random sample of over four hundred was scrutinized. From this number, representative quotes were extracted to illustrate patterns of representation. Four sets of securitizing actors figured in this discourse: foreign news journalists who authored it and the humanitarians, politicians, and diplomats (international and domestic) they drew on for information and quotes. As the intention here is to show how child civilians figured in the process of securitization, particular emphasis has been placed on them in this reading.

Kinsella's investigation of the social construction of civilianhood over time stresses gender, innocence and vulnerability. These will be discussed briefly later. For now it is sufficient to note that the latter two signifiers are strongly associated with children in the western social imaginary, in addition to age. Children are also linked to particular spaces and activities: home or school, play rather than labour. Oftentimes, they are coupled with the activities of the family unit such as socialization, reproduction and care and they are frequently embedded in representations of family structure, as daughters and sons, siblings and grandchildren etc. Ideologies exist in which children are perceived as inherently good or evil, or as individuals in the process of becoming, i.e. developing. In the western social imaginary, childhood is closely related to nature and to the body. These various aspects of childhood are listed here not to define it but to provide markers that orient a first reading of the news media texts.[15] In the sections that follow they are highlighted where they have been found to be important signifiers in the discourse as a whole. This first reading of the texts is broken into a number of themes that dominated the texts. They are: vulnerability; women and children; family, culture and masculinity; trauma; irrationality, backwardness and passivity; the rescuers and the rescued.

Vulnerability

Although highly impersonalized in form, the use of statistics in the texts conveyed the acute vulnerability of the population as the civil war in Somalia got under way. Much of the early reportage, in particular, focused on the sheer numbers of those suffering war-related injuries,

---

[14] New York Times, 1992d. San Francisco Chronicle, 1992b. Washington Post, 1992c. Wall Street Journal, 1994.

[15] James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998. Jenks, 1996. Prout & James, 1997.

famine or displacement and the rate at which they were dying, conjuring up a profound sense of urgency. *USA Today*, for example, relayed the UN secretary-general's startling assertion that 100 thousand had already died after a year of war, that 2.5 million had been displaced and a third of the population (1.5-2 million) would "die within the next six months if emergency food supplies do not reach that country soon."[16] The overwhelming nature of the problems facing the refugees were apparent in descriptions of, for example, how they "flooded over the border," creating massive "tent cities" where they landed and forming throngs at feeding centres.[17]

From the texts, it was clear that the population's vulnerability was thought to stem from sources external to the subject such as the state and armed groups, as well as sources internal to the individual such as human biology. The core functions of the public sphere, like the monopoly on the use of force, were lost as the state collapsed. A multiplicity of state institutions crumbled. The "national currency [had] become worthless and only food [had] any monetary value," *Associated Press* stated.[18] Similar observations were made by others: "There is no government. No civil service. No commerce. No food."[19] Social provision, such as medical care, was negligible in its Western sense. In the absence of the rule of law, guns became the chief form of authority, according to *Reuters*.[20] The greatest peril appeared to come from the warring factions themselves. The brutality of clan warlords and their gangs of supporters prompted Africa Watch to remark that Mogadishu had become "a special place in the annals of human cruelty."[21]

The physical conditions imposed on populations by the war were further external determinants of vulnerability, exacerbating the everyday challenges of survival in what was presented as an unforgiving climate. Somalia was said to be "one of the unhealthiest places on Earth, where a scratch can become a festering wound in days."[22] There was little respite offered by a healthcare system crippled by war. One account of the squalid conditions of one Somali hospital described "the stench of human decay" that greeted the reporter's arrival.[23]

Women and children

---

[16] USA Today, 1992.
[17] Washington Post, 1992a.
[18] Associated Press, 1992.
[19] Oregonian, 1992a.
[20] Reuters News, 1992.
[21] Austin American-Statesman, 1992b.
[22] Rocky Mountain News, 1993.
[23] Austin American-Statesman, 1992b. See also Seattle Times, 1992a.

The conditions took their toll on women and children more than men, according to most depictions. The shelter that starving women could find in the "punishing heat" might be no more than makeshift huts made from branches and cardboard.[24] Women's isolation from men worsened their predicament. "The women were the ones who were suffering," the *Dallas Morning News* insisted, "The men were off fighting, so only the women were occupied with taking care of the children, the old people, even the injured men."[25] But women were also victims of a patriarchal culture in which stoning of women prostitutes still occurred, a punishment the journalist found "incongruous for the end of the 20th century."[26] The physical dimensions to their vulnerability were frequently rehearsed. The story of several women who were injured on barbed wire barricades while food rioting erupted offers a prime example.[27]

Young children fared little better by Somali culture. Girls were denied education in the Koranic system of schooling, for example.[28] Many starving children were reduced to sucking on bones, not for nourishment but for the comfort derived from mimicking eating, a UN worker explained.[29] During war, it was clear that children were worst affected. Time and again, newspapers reminded readers of their predicament and linked it to warlord and clan behaviour. "I hate them," one child answered when asked about local combatants, their clan violence being the chief obstacle to his development for the press.[30] A quarter of all under fives had perished before US humanitarian intervention had begun and two hundred or more children were dying daily in the capital.[31] Some were even killed by soldiers for bags of grain.[32] The state of the war-torn country was closely linked to the plight of its children. A French minister, describing his impressions on a visit there was reported to say, "I found death, the death of a country and above all of children lying in the streets."[33]

There was no segment of society more symbolic of vulnerability than the orphan population. Physical weakness due to youth and hunger and a lack of protection by family, clan or the public sphere rendered them the supreme victims of war.

---

[24] New York Times, 1991. Reuters News, 1992.
[25] Dallas Morning News, 1992.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Associated Press, 1993b.
[28] Dallas Morning News, 1994.
[29] Agence France-Presse, 1992.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Seattle Times, 1992b.
[32] San Francisco Chronicle, 1992a.
[33] San Francisco Chronicle, 1992b.

> Robbed of their fathers by war and their mothers by famine and disease, thousands of Somali children have been left orphaned, struggling to survive on their own in the chaos of a country in which their villages have been destroyed, their extended families have disappeared and no government structure exists to care for them.[34]

Constructed as targets of attack on account of the food they received from international agencies, many orphans were relocated to a leper colony that warlords' were too fearful to approach.[35] For reporters, the story illustrated the degeneration of the social order in Somalia such that its weakest members could be the targets of violence. Further discussion about Somalis' resistance to the adoption of orphans by foreigners confirmed the suspicion that Somali society did not hold the best interests of children at heart: "when outsiders have offered to adopt orphans and provide homes for them in the United States or Europe, Muslim tradition and Somali culture have combined to block their efforts."[36]

Family, culture and masculinity

The family and clan was considered the primary vector of a pastoral tradition in Somalia and the "bedrock of identity." Yet, they also promoted the "continual atomization of the society" and a failure to recognise the public good.[37] A blindness to the public good allowed Somali clans and sub-clans to continue to fight unmoved by the dire need in their midst and intent to actively add to the tragedy, it was argued, by attacking aid shipments for example.[38] The clan thus promoted values antithetical to community spirit or peace. It entrenched an aggressive, militarism in an individualistic people, the *New York Times* maintained.[39] Even in high political office, the same sentiments had traction. Former US ambassador to Kenya, Smith Hempstone, described Somalis in a cable to the president as "natural-born guerrillas... treacherous. The Somali is a killer. The Somali is as tough as his country, and just as unforgiving."[40]

In the media narrative of the conflict, it was Somali men and adolescent boys who manifested this aggressive national character. In the capital, there were said to be "thousands of armed,

---

[34] Houston Chronicle, 1993.
[35] Reuters News, 1993a.
[36] Houston Chronicle, 1993.
[37] St. Petersburg Times, 1992b.
[38] Austin American-Statesman, 1992b.
[39] New York Times, 1991.
[40] Washington Times, 1993.

hungry and ill-disciplined men roaming the streets."[41] Their lack of self control was often exacerbated by drugs. Their aggression was untrammeled and "untrained, frenzied young men" created such anarchy that one reporter dubbed the conflict a "Western."[42] There was such a ready availability of small arms that a US aid official alleged that a "very high percentage of males above puberty are carrying automatic weapons." The levels of violence young Somali males dished out was of great concern and the psychological toll this took on the perpetrators themselves in addition to their victims. It seemed from accounts that thousands of children used as soldiers in the war had lost their moral code. Trauma was the legacy of war for these boys, some as young as 10 or 12 who thereafter were "haunted by dreams of death."[43]

Trauma

The media rendered the population deeply and in some cases irrevocably affected by exposure to war and famine. "People were being killed in front of us... Women were being raped in front of us," one Somali recalled.[44] Large numbers of the population had watched as their family members, sometimes all of them, died from famine.[45] Such stories cast into doubt the prospect of Somalia's recovery. "The survivors of great famines are broken for all their lives," the *Seattle Times* claimed, "their children inherit the frailty of their parents. They are a weight that retards the recovery of the people as a whole."[46]

The psychological damage done during the war was used by some to account for the behaviour of some women and children during and after the infamous 'Battle of Mogadishu' in which several US peacekeepers died. The women and children had joined the gunmen in scuppering a US operation and had participated in the public desecration of the bodies of the peacekeepers and a translator who died during the ensuring combat.[47] The revulsion felt by the American public was clearly reflected in newspapers' language. The more restrained of them described the women and children as "jubilant" as they flaunted a dead man's teeth in their hands to foreign journalists.[48] To make sense of these acts as the public uproar in the US grew *USA Today* consulted a political psychologist who explained the events as the result of the regular "demonization and dehumanization of the enemy" in war. Another accounted for the triumphalist display as retribution from a nation who had seen many of their own killed by

---

[41] Times Picayune, 1992.
[42] New York Times, 1992b. Reuters News, 1992.
[43] Reuters News, 1993b.
[44] St. Petersburg Times, 1992a.
[45] Washington Post, 1992a.
[46] Seattle Times, 1992a.
[47] Virginian-Pilot, 1993.
[48] Buffalo News, 1994.

US weapons.[49] The implication of the texts was clear: Somalia's civilians had been corrupted by their experiences of war and now constituted a threat to US peacekeepers.

Irrationality, backwardness and passivity

Somalis were regularly depicted as uneducated, backward and child-like. "Too many youths [...] can shoot a gun but don't know how to read," a Unicef worker lamented.[50] The violence they engaged in was described as feuding and their warfare and materiel as outdated.[51] World politics was thought to lie beyond their grasp.[52] They were frequently pictured high on khat that even adolescent boys chewed.[53] Somali behaviour was regularly constructed as irrational and self-defeating.[54] They were, in the words of one commentator, "incapable of giving themselves stable and competent government, even when left alone to try."[55] Their response to the humanitarianism shown towards them was baffling. "[I]t must be asked," one Canadian journalist mused, "why people who have been saved from starvation should now be consumed by such savage hatred of their erstwhile benefactors."[56]

However, it was the bodies of the starving that did most to convey irrationality. The majority of Somali civilians were represented as little more than frail bodies, as surfaces on which the narratives of death and suffering could be written. A typical account would highlight the state of emaciation of limbs, the slowness of movement and the dullness of the responses of the starving.[57] Almost invariably, the agency of starving civilians was omitted from the texts and indeed seemed almost impossible given their physical state. The picture drawn of a four-year old in soiled clothing "blink[ing] dully, giving scant attention to the sore on his arms" while an IRC nurse described his imminent death is one such passivating account.[58] Readers were not spared descriptions of emaciation and the blood, urine, pus and diarrhea that accompanied many Somalis' last moments. One American nurse compared the scene of starvation to "a horror movie in which skeletons emerge from their graves to terrorize the living."[59]

The rescuers and the rescued

---

[49] USA Today, 1993.
[50] Dallas Morning News, 1994.
[51] New York Times, 1992c
[52] Times Picayune, 1993. Reuters News, 1992. Christian Science Monitor, 1993. Christian Science Monitor, 1992.
[53] Austin American-Statesman, 1992b. Plain Dealer, 1993. Dallas Morning News, 1992.
[54] Times Picayune, 1992
[55] Patriot-News, 1993.
[56] Toronto Star, 1993.
[57] Washington Post, 1992a
[58] Times Picayune, 1992.
[59] Austin American-Statesman, 1992a.

Media accounts regularly depicted the endeavours of the peacekeepers and humanitarian aid workers. They focused on the enormity of the task they faced and the expertise and capabilities they employed in battling it. The American media placed great value on the contribution of US forces, in particular. For instance, one newspaper reported that eleven US planes could transport twice as much food into Somalia as the combined relief agencies had managed in eight months.[60] With UNITAF, the US could protect relief convoys and ensure aid reached those who needed it rather than the strongest clans.[61] It could dispense with the hiring of local gunmen to guard aid.[62] Its military (being the major contributor of forces) could use its strength to put an end to the starving of over a million people and facilitate recovery. It could act, in effect, like a "cavalry."[63] The much-needed care international teams could give could begin with the security that US peacekeepers brought to the country. Accordingly, "[a]id workers could do their job again and they slowly nurse Somalia back from its deathbed."[64]

With the success of the mission in its early months, there was reason for Americans to express pride. "[The peacekeepers] were acting in the best spirit of America," President Clinton commented.[65] The generosity of the American public was a source of satisfaction: "The idea that kids are dying because no one can spare a handful of grain is not acceptable to most Americans."[66] The US had been able to wield its power to good ends. Aid workers faced daunting challenges. "We're now feeding two or three times the number of children that our feeding centres were designed for," an SCF field director explained. An American was described running a hospital of 20 beds as the sole hospital service for two million people in another report.[67] The physical danger the aid staff worked under was considerable, and mortal at times.

There was also a psychological risk attached to the humanitarian mission. Aid workers recalled the scenes of death they had encountered that continued to haunt them.[68] The psychological ill effects of exposure to war and famine were even felt by US troops. They too were distressed by the sight of children starving and of rape and "confused" by Somalis

---

[60] Tulsa World, 1992.
[61] San Francisco Chronicle, 1992b.
[62] Economist, 1992. Washington Post, 1992b.
[63] New York Times, 1992a.
[64] Rocky Mountain News, 1993.
[65] Associated Press, 1993a.
[66] Orange County Register, 1992.
[67] Austin American-Statesman, 1992a.
[68] Oregonian, 1992b.

who were hostile to them, throwing stones, spitting or even shooting at them.[69] However, this had been expected, however: "Officials here say that they are more concerned about the psychological impact of human suffering on their soldiers than they are about the threats of Somali street gangs or illness."[70]

The Somali crisis provoked a profound emotional response from the family members of aid workers and peacekeepers 'back home.' Families of US peacekeepers were interviewed in the wake of the Battle of Mogadishu and told journalists of their worry and sleeplessness in the days preceding it as the situation in Somalia steadily worsened. Upon witnessing the "televised horror" of the battle itself, a soldier's mother recalled, "I went to pieces... Devastated, I wanted to die myself.[71] Revulsion was reflected across the spectrum of newspapers in the aftermath of the battle. A journalist opined "The blood of our courageous troops is too precious to spill into this quagmire.".[72] The conviction was even more visible in the US press coverage that followed the battle. "Our brave troops' blood means too much to all of us to squander on a war that rightly isn't ours to wage. Let's bring them home."[73] A sense of US community was invoked by the battle as it had been by the intervention's instigation.

Child civilians: a second reading

From the sketch of the discourse presented above, three types of subject emerge: civilians, combatants and humanitarians (peacekeepers and aid workers). As this paper claims that the construction of child civilians helped to shape securitization, it is appropriate to turn now to the concept of civilianhood. Legally, civilianhood equates *prima facie* with non-combatant status and invokes the principle of non-combatant immunity.[74] However, Kinsella's genealogy posits a range of powerful social meanings to the term that may be separated here from its weighty legal connotations for the purposes of this analysis. According to Kinsella, the concept of the civilian is related to, *inter alia,* age, corporeality and family but gender above all. Kinsella's reading argues that putatively 'natural' female characteristics have long been the basis for distinguishing the category of civilian from combatant. Innocence and a need for protection are especially critical to civilianhood. Indeed, one could say that these two 'feminine' characteristics are the sources of value for civilianhood, the referent objects of security. Historically, effort has been invested in reforming women into individuals with

---

[69] Boston Globe, 1993b.
[70] Seattle Post-Intellegencer, 1992.
[71] Boston Globe, 1993a.
[72] Salt Lake Tribune, 1993.
[73] Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph, 1993.
[74] Primoratz, 2007.

fittingly feminine subjectivities when they have conducted themselves in ways that apparently flout their gender.[75] In contrast, women civilians who performed the roles of men lost their civilian status and were effectively treated as men.[76] In short, the maintenance of the boundaries to conceptualizations of women and civilians required the disciplining of deviant individuals by rehabilitation or reclassification to retain their gendered logic.

For Kinsella, the primary distinction between the civilian and combatant is gender, all other meanings of civilianhood are epiphenomenal. A corollary of the centrality she awards to gender is that other categories of civilians – children, the elderly, the sick and other non-combatants – must also display typically gendered attributes to qualify as civilians. It is argued here that gender does not exhaust the meaning of civilian. Gender may provide the main logic as the dominant signifier, nonetheless, other key signifiers and articulations in the discourse are noteworthy and crucial to the discourse under scrutiny here. Children, the elderly and the sick may arrive at innocence and the need for protection through representations and logics that are different from those of gender. The remainder of this section is a reinterpretation of the discourse summarized above. In this re-reading, particular attention is given to the differences in how children's civilianhood and others' are constructed, especially women as they make up the second most dominant civilian category in the discourse.

In presenting the enormity of the plight Somali civilians faced, journalists liberally employed mortality statistics, death and starvation rates but applied these to only three groups: Somali civilians in general, children and the under fives. No statistics were given for women as a separate category but there was no lack of figures for children. We learned that measles was the primary killer of all under fives, for example, and that a quarter of all under fives had died by mid 1992.[77] In addition to the accenting of age by the use of these categories, children's physical state of weakness induced by war, starvation or disease was also continuously foregrounded. It appeared from the discourse that children were inherently more physically vulnerable than women. "Feeble Somalis, many of them children, are expiring as they stand in line for food. Many end up in the makeshift graveyards that now adjoin food kitchens," the *Buffalo News* bemoaned.[78]

[75] Elshtain, 1998.
[76] Kinsella, 2004, p. 10.
[77] Rocky Mountain News, 1993a. Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 1992b.
[78] Buffalo News, 1992.

Children's physical vulnerabilities were different too. Women were susceptible to rape by warring parties but child abuse, where it happened, was never mentioned. Both women and children could be attacked for food although attacks on children received more attention. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that several children were killed in Mogadishu for the grain they had.[79] In contrast to children, women were more frequently portrayed as survivors. Consequently, their vulnerability had emotional connotations that children's lacked; they were more often seen grieving for lost family members, for example. Despite the greater emotional distress apparently incurred by women, the psychological impact of the war and famine was more strongly associated with children, and with teenage boys in particular, many of whom were portrayed as perpetrators of violence.

Women's vulnerability in the texts was more elaborated in the sense that it took on a greater variety of forms. Yet it was children's vulnerability to which journalists dedicated more column inches. Moreover, women's vulnerability was more tightly linked to circumstance than children's: for example, women faced the problems of providing food, shelter and care for their families and had to endure the constraints of a patriarchal culture. As a result, the prevailing social order appeared to be more at risk by women's reduced ability to fulfill their traditional roles. Children's roles were also altered and the social order affected by the lack of education provision for them (although this was poor to begin with) and by the arming of hundreds of adolescents. Yet the ramifications of this were to be felt directly by a small portion of the child population. Furthermore, the meaning awarded this in the texts was expressed as anxiety about the future shape of Somali society. So, while both women and children were constructed as the victims of circumstance (culture, war, famine, attack) and of biology (physical weakness, susceptibility to rape), overall children's vulnerability was more rooted in biology and deferred from the ongoing crisis than women's.

In the western social imaginary, children are commonly understood to be in a process of development that adults have completed. This development is a natural unfolding and can be thwarted by negative socializing forces such as exposure to violence. As mentioned above, there was concern expressed in the texts that hundreds of older boys in Mogadishu were involved in conflict and perpetrated crime. "[T]eenage males idled by peace still drive around in heavily armed 'technicals,'" the *Dallas Morning News* complained.[80] Warlords would feed khat to their "young gunslingers to keep nerves on alert even if bellies were

---

[79] San Francisco Chronicle, 1992a.
[80] Dallas Morning News, 1992.

empty," newspapers maintained.[81] The absence of reputable sources of socialization over children, such as education rather than warlords, generated further anxiety amongst commentators. It appeared that the future social order depended on the full development of its young generation's potential, including psychological development, and this was impeded by the crisis.

Yet, there was the possibility of change if Somalis embraced it but the newspapers were pessimistic about the prospects. For western onlookers, Somalis resistance to the healthcare humanitarian agencies provided showed woeful ignorance. Likewise, there was an ignorance of the benefits to be gained from counseling for those traumatised by war, especially children, a situation one Save the Children worker thought "almost Dickensian."[82] Somali resistance to the adoption of orphans by foreigners was a further example of backwardness that served to punish children and jeopardize their futures.[83] Hence, many children were vulnerable to corrupting influences and could not avail of reform measures. Yet, children were constructed as intrinsically good in the western social imaginary and this precluded most errant Somali children from bearing any blame. Only rarely would they be held culpable for their misdemeanors by the press.

The construction of civilians as innocent and vulnerable demanded that most occasions of deviance be silenced. Thus, without any sense of contradiction, violent adolescent boys were regrouped with men while younger or non-combatant boys remained associated with women and other children. "The [Somali] state is dead and its successors are children with AK rifles, holding women and children to ransom."[84] The reworked boundary was unremarkable because violence was still an activity wedded to masculinity and, consequently, those boys who perpetrated it achieved adultness as a result. The shifts of the boundary operated to preserve the general validity of the civilian-combatant distinction and its gender and age-related meanings.

An important technique used in preserving the civilian-combatant boundary was the construction of a Somali hyper-masculinity. This served as a foil against which Somali women's innocence and vulnerability appeared more amplified. The aggression and militarism of Somali men was directed not only towards other Somali men in rival clans, but towards Somali women. Somali masculinity was predatory and acted to deepen the

---

[81] Plain Dealer, 1993. Dallas Morning News, 1992.
[82] Reuters News, 1993b.
[83] Houston Chronicle, 1993.
[84] Straits Times, 1992.

victimhood attached to Somali women and the divide between combatants and civilians. The portrayal of Somali civilians as recipients of protection was an equally significant technique in boundary maintenance. The texts paid attention to the protection offered by humanitarians – peacekeepers creating a safe environment for the delivery of aid and aid workers distributing it and medical care to civilians. The dichotomy between the active rescuers and the vulnerable, passive rescued was illustrated repeatedly with this trope.

The combatant-civilian boundary broke down subsequent to the Battle of Mogadishu in three ways. Firstly, large numbers of civilians were constructed as a threat to peacekeepers rather than under their protection. Secondly, women and children were described as party to the violence meted out to peacekeepers and the desecration of their bodies. Thirdly, the celebrations of civilians at the defeat and death of peacekeepers tarred all civilians with the aggressiveness usually attributed only to men and older boys. Effectively, their complicity with men and adolescent boys eradicated the usual stark contrast between civilians and combatants. The end result was a set of constructions in the media inconsistent with understandings of civilianhood. The withdrawal of US peacekeepers and the protection they offered followed.

In summary, the term civilian has a number of meanings in the social imaginary, the most important of which are innocence and vulnerability which bring with them the need for protection. Gender and age are also crucially important meanings. In the discourse on Somalia, the manner in which women and children were constructed as innocent and vulnerable varied. Whereas women's vulnerability was more circumstantial, children's derived more from biology and a need for an uncorrupted physical and psychological development path. Despite the violent acts committed by many children, their inherent goodness exonerated them from culpability and their innocence remained intact. Where this stretched innocence excessively, they were awarded combatant status and adulthood by association with men. Thus, of the two civilian categories garnering greatest coverage in the media, the construction of the child civilian was more profound, more robust and flexible. It was anchored in supposedly immutable facts of nature. It was perhaps for this reason that children achieved greatest visibility in the texts because they demonstrated civilian need more deeply and reliably than women. Gender was insufficient by itself to maintain the difference of women civilians from male combatants, innocence had to be shown and not assumed as it could be for children. Consequently, women's civilian status was more contingent than children's.

Securitization and the Somali child civilian

Several moves are discernable in the securitization of the crisis in Somali. They are listed here without any intention of implying a sequence. The first was the demonstration of urgent overwhelming need that could not be met by alternative means, by the work of charitable agencies or UN peacekeepers on the ground, for example. Secondly, the intervention provided the US with an opportunity to gain soft power and demonstrate its position and hopes for a new world order. Thus intervention was revealed, over time, to be in the best interests of the US. Thirdly, the intervention was considered to be feasible as warfighting and materiel in Somalia were rudimentary and the risk manageable. Fourthly, the risk to US peacekeepers was outweighed by the obvious humanitarian need of foreign civilians. Fifthly, need translated into the need for protection rather than merely relief supplies or expertise for large parts of the population. Sixthly, that population qualified as civilians in the American social imaginary because they were both vulnerable and innocent. Lastly, vulnerability was undeniable because it was chiefly anchored in children's nature. It was also related to – although less powerfully – to the circumstances of women and the ramifications of their failure to uphold the social order. Innocence stemmed largely from children's natural goodness. The logic running through these securitizing moves was reversed by the demonstration of unacceptable risk to US peacekeepers. That this partly came from civilians themselves diminished the validity of constructions of innocence and showed Somali civilians' complicity with their own plight.

Conclusions

This study utilized securitization theory in its attempts to position children more firmly within the realm of security studies. It showed that the successful securitization of the intervention in Somalia relied on the construction of the Somali population as deserving of protection. Children played a fundamental role in this and acted as an important vector in the ascent of Somalia up the US political agenda.

However, securitization theory has its weaknesses and has been subject to extensive critique. Rather than rehearse that critique here, suffice to point to certain strategies adopted in this paper to avoid pitfalls the literature has identified. Perhaps the most notable is the charge that political elites' actions are overemphasized in securitization theory to the detriment of others'[85] and that too much weight is placed on a small number of speech acts at specific moments in time.[86] Here, a wider range of actors was considered to play a role in securitization. As the debate on Somalia is often taken as the prime example of the influence

[85] Pram Gad & Lund Petersen, 2011.

[86] McDonald, 2008, p. 576. Stritzel, 2011, pp. 349-350.

of the media, it would have been unwise to exclude this set of actors nor their informants. An attempt to paint in the backdrop to the Somali crisis was made and to broaden the number of speech acts that impacted securitization and the period over which they occurred.[87] The intertextuality of the speech act was conveyed in this study by attending to the meaning of children in the western social imaginary and most obviously by the focus placed on the social meaning of civilianhood there.[88] The author does not suggest that a discourse analysis sidestepped all problems: it omitted the role of an audience, for example, and had to assume that representational practices that were dominant across the US news media discourse reflected the US social imaginary in general.[89] In this way, dominant representational practices operated as a kind of proxy for the audience, although this was not ideal.

However, the chief problem securitization theory presented this analysis was its indifference to how the value of the referent object of security is created in favour of a discussion of threat.[90] To have neglected value creation here would have been to overlook the value of children to the discourse entirely and therefore to have passed over the grammar of securitization in the Somali case. Illustrating the existence of existential threat to a referent object was important but insufficient by itself. Threat and vulnerability are two sides of the same coin and there was utility in unpacking each separately for the Somali case. How children were vulnerable and how, by virtue of their innocence, they were deserving of protection were points of enormous significance in the public discourse that helped bring about securitization.

The Somali case is an example of militarized humanitarian intervention and is not the usual material for securitization scholarship. For countries with a history of peacekeeping, the procedures for involvement in interventions may be normalized and securitization theory may offer few insights as a result. However, for especially dangerous or contentious interventions or those for which the responsibility to protect may be invoked, securitization theory may bring benefits. As long as children's profile in humanitarian emergencies remains high, there is purpose served in scrutinizing their involvement.

Bibliography

Primary Literature

---

[87] Abrahamsen, 2005.
[88] Salter, 2008.
[89] Balzacq, 2005.
[90] McDonald, 2008, p. 571.

Agence France-Presse. (1992, Aug. 27th). Food aid reaches remote areas, by Jean-Pierre Campagne.
All Things Considered. (1993, Oct. 6th). US re-evaluates its role in Somalia (Radio Broadcast).
Associated Press. (1991, Dec. 2nd). Mines: A misstep could mean death or maiming, by Didrikke Schanke.
Associated Press. (1992, May 5th). Violence, traditions delay food aid to starving Somalia, by Reid G. Miller.
Associated Press. (1993a, Oct. 4th). US deaths rise in Somalia: More troops to go, by Susanne M. Schafer.
Associated Press. (1993b, Sept. 20th). US troops kill two militiamen: Sporadic fighting overnight, by GG LaBelle.
Atlanta Journal and Constitution. (1992, Aug. 27th). Somalia: The political geography of starvation, by Ali Mohamed.
Austin American-Statesman. (1992a, Aug. 10th). Civil war, starvation transforming Somalia into the 'land of the dead,' by Louis J. Salome.
Austin American-Statesman. (1992b, May 14th). Somalians struggle to survive amid chaos of civil war, by Rick Lyman.
Boston Globe. (1992, Dec. 4th). In a reversal, liberals back Bush's decision on Somalia, by Brian McGrory.
Boston Globe. (1993a, Oct. 6th). Mothers fear for sons in war zone, by Tom Coakley.
Boston Globe. (1993b, March 15th). Only local heroes: Somalia vets' praises are sung in a low key, by Erfrain Hernandez Jr.
Buffalo News. (1992, Aug. 7th). World must move quickly to stop tragedy in Somalia.
Buffalo News. (1994, June 29th). A photographer's album of horror from Somalia, by Louis Continelli.
Christian Science Monitor. (1992, May 1st). Who will help Somalia? by Vanni Cappelli.
Christian Science Monitor. (1993, Oct. 6th). The anger of Somali families, by Scott Peterson.
Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph. (1993, Oct. 5th). Pull troops out of Somalia now.
Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report. (1992a, May 16th). African nations lose their appeal for US aid as cold war thaws, by Carol J. Doherty.
Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report. (1992b, Aug. 8th). Senate urges UN force be deployed in Somalia.
Dallas Morning News. (1992, March 8th). Fighting back Somali civil war stirs effort by some women to end mistreatment, gain more political say, by Lennox Samuels.
Dallas Morning News. (1994, June 11th). Koranic schools play key role in Somalia: They're helping restore education system, by Ed Timms.
Economist. (1992, May 9th). Civil war means relief agencies need armed help.
Houston Chronicle. (1993, March 14th). Small victims, big struggle: Orphanage helps rescue Somalia's abandoned children, by Molly Moore.
New York Times. (1991, Dec. 29th). Somalia self destructs and the world looks on, by Jane Perlez.

New York Times. (1992a, Sept. 1st). A foreign legion for the world.
New York Times. (1992b, Aug. 26th). Amid Somalia's frenzy, family fights to survive, by Jane Perlez.
New York Times. (1992c, Aug. 30th). Barrier to Somali unity: Clan rivalry, by Jane Perlez.
New York Times. (1992d, Dec. 10th). TV army on the beach took US by surprise, by Michael R. Gordon.
Orange County Register. (1992, Aug. 27th). Compassion to drive giving despite recession, charities say, by Carroll Lacknit.
Oregonian. (1992a, Aug. 9th). Somalia's chaos begs for international force, by Johnathan Power.
Oregonian. (1992b, Nov. 30th). The face of famine, by Benjamin Brink.
Patriot-News. (1993, June 17th). UN could provide much needed neo-colonialism in Somalia, by William Pfaff.
Plain Dealer. (1993, Nov. 29th). Somalis still savor khat: Folks relish plant amid war, famine.
Reuters News. (1992, May 7th). Marriage of convenience brings Somalia food, by Andrew Hill.
Reuters News. (1993a, March 21st). Lepers, orphans pitched together in Somali strife, by Sue Pleming.
Reuters News. (1993b, May 30th). Somalia's young suffer combat fatigue, by Jonathan Ewing.
Reuters News. (1993c, July 14th). World community may act less after Bosnia, Somalia, by Nicholas Doughty.
Rocky Mountain News. (1993, Dec. 8th). Famine ebbs but chaos thrives in Somalia, by Nejla Sammakia.
Salt Lake Tribune. (1993, Sept. 30th). A war unworthy of US troop involvement.
San Francisco Chronicle. (1992a, Aug. 7th). Starvation perils Somalia.
San Francisco Chronicle. (1992b, Aug. 7th). UN team arrives in Somalia to plan major relief effort.
Seattle Post-Intellegencer. (1992, Dec. 10th). Medic unit braces for Somalia desperation, by Ed Offley.
Seattle Times. (1992a, Aug. 26th). As the West shrugs, heroes toil in Somalia, by Richard O'Mara.
Seattle Times. (1992b, Dec. 4th). 'We must give them hope' - Bush orders troops to African nation in UN-approved relief plan, by Times News Service.
St. Louis Post-Dispatch. (1992, Aug. 28th). Miscues worsen Somalia's plight.
St. Petersburg Times. (1992a, Aug. 29th). Somalia situation critical.
St. Petersburg Times. (1992b, Dec. 4th). Warring factions at root of Somali crisis.
Straits Times. (1992, Nov. 30th). Somalia and Yugoslavia test limits of UN intervention.
Times Picayune. (1992, May 10th). War chaos stifling Somalian relief, by Todd Shields.
Times Picayune. (1993, Sept. 23rd). Woman helps schools start up again in Somalia, by Brenda Thompson.
Toronto Star. (1993, Oct. 4th). Dozens killed in Somalia bloodbath, by Paul Watson.
Tulsa World. (1992, Aug. 29th). Beacon in the dark: The military is there in times of disaster, by Ken Adelman.

USA Today. (1992, Aug. 31st). Somalia is not alone in fighting famine, by Elizabeth Schmidt.
USA Today. (1993, Oct. 6th). Flaunting war's fallen: History shows not exclusive to Somalia, by Sam Vincent Meddis and Marilyn Greene.
Virginian-Pilot. (1993, Sept. 16th). Stuck (for now) in the Somalia quagmire: A fool's errand?
Wall Street Journal Europe. (1994, July 5th). What really shapes policy? TV goads, but doesn't guide, crisis response, by Nik Gowing.
Washington Post. (1992a, Aug. 11th). Famine, disease place Somalis in death grip, by Keith B. Richburg.
Washington Post. (1992b, May 2nd). Horn of misery.
Washington Post. (1992c, Dec. 4th). Liberians ask why US avoided their war, by Keith B. Richburg.
Washington Post. (1992d, April 23rd). New world disorder.
Washington Times. (1993, Oct. 6th). Mission of mercy starts to remind many of Vietnam, by Rowan Scarborough.

Secondary Literature

Abrahamsen, R. (2005). Blair's Africa: The politics of securitiation and fear. *Alternatives, 30*, 55-80.
Balzacq, T. (2005). The three faces of securitization: Political agency, audience and context. *European Journal of International Relations, 11*(2), 171-201.
Burman, E. (1994). Innocents abroad: Western fantasies of childhood and the iconography of emergencies. *Disasters, 18*(5).
Elshtain, J. B. (1998). Women and War ten years on. *Review of International Studies, 24*, 447-460.
Glanville, L. (2005). Somalia reconsidered: An examination of the nrom of humanitarian intervention. *International Affairs, 77*(1), 113-128.
James, A., Jenks, C., & Prout, A. (1998). *Theorizing Childhood*. London: Polity Press.
Jenks, C. (1996). *Childhood*. London and New York: Routledge.
Kinsella, H. M. (2004). *Securing the civilian: Sex and gender in the laws of war*: Boston Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights.
Labonte, M. (2013). *Human Rights and Humanitarian Norms, Strategic Framing and Intervention: Lessons for the Responsibility to Protect*. Oxford and New York: Routledge.
Lofland, V. J. (2002). Somalia: US intervention and Operation Restore Hope. In D. A. Williams (Ed.), *Case Studies in Policy Making and Implementation*. Newport: Naval War College.
McDonald, M. (2008). Securitization and the construction of security. *European Journal of International Relations, 14*(4), 563-587.
Pram Gad, U., & Lund Petersen, K. (2011). Concepts of politics in securitization studies. *Security Dialogue, 42*(4-5), 315-328.
Primoratz, I. (2007). Civilian immunity in war: its grounds, scope, and weight. In I. Primoratz (Ed.), *Civilian Immunity in War*: Oxford University Press.
Prout, A., & James, A. (1997). Introduction. In A. James & A. Prout (Eds.), *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (2nd ed.). London and New York: Routledge-Falmer.

Salter, M. B. (2008). Securitization and desecuritization: A dramaturgical analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority. *Journal of International Relations and Development, 11*, 321-349.

Stritzel, H. (2011). Security, the translation. *Security Dialogue, 42*(4-5), 343-355.

UN Dept of Peacekeeping. (1997). *United Nations Operation in Somalia I*: www.un.org/Depts/DPKO/Missions/unosomi.htm.