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'If you destroy our children, I will kill you': biopolitical childhood in Southeast Asia's war on drugs

Abstract:

This article explores how the war on drugs in Southeast Asia upholds the protection of the young as a key justification for extrajudicial killings carried out by the state. As many as 30,000 extrajudicial killings took place during Philippine former President Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs between 2016 and 2022, echoing a similar anti-drugs campaign in Thailand in 2003, which saw around 3,000 people murdered. Drawing on political speeches, this article argues that Duterte and Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra deployed biopolitical patterns of discourse to legitimise the murder of those associated with the drug trade. Both leaders framed the threat of drugs to children through the biopolitical lens of the integrity of the family, national health, and therefore the future of the nation. Further than this however, this article demonstrates how in the Philippines drug war, children were effectively denied their childhood status and presented as 'dangerous becomings'. This reveals the contingent nature of childhood, as biopolitical criteria were also used to establish which children were perceived to be dangerous in the context of the drug war. In doing so, this paper serves to nuance and problematise how children are depicted in Security Studies, and International Relations more broadly.

Despite their inescapable presence within security discourses, children remain a neglected subject in the field of International Relations. However, in recent years, a range of timely work has led to discussions around the role of children within a range of contexts, including war, often as child soldiers (Lee-Koo 2011; Fox 2004; Macmillan 2009), human security (Jacob 2014; Wagnsson, Hellman and Holmberg 2010) and humanitarian intervention (Macmillan 2015; Moeller 2002). Much of the work in International Relations focuses on children as victims of security processes, but less consideration has been given to situations where children may simultaneously represent objects of protection and targets. The role of the children within the war on drugs thus stands out, as according to the UN General Assembly Special Session on drugs held in 2016, children represent the 'logical victim of drugs' (Flacks 2018, 56). In a bid to address this lacuna, this paper shows how two comparable drug wars, in Thailand in 2003, and the Philippines from 2016 until the election of Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos last year, used the

protection of children as a defining justification for the campaigns. Simultaneously however, as part of the drug war in the Philippines, supposedly errant children were targeted, both physically and discursively. At least 122 children have been killed (OMCT 2020) as part of the drug war in the Philippines, whilst as many as 30,000 others have fallen victim to security forces and other associated perpetrators (ICC- CPI 2021a, 11). In September 2021, the International Criminal Court ordered a full investigation into the Philippines war on drugs, noting that the campaign 'cannot be seen as a legitimate law enforcement operation' (ICC-CPI, 2021). Likewise, during the war on drugs undertaken by Thaksin Shinawatra in 2003, a number of children fell victim to similarly state sponsored killings (Human Rights Watch 2003) but were not as clearly targeted in a systematic fashion.

Here it is argued that the discourses of the war on drugs in Southeast Asia uphold children as biopolitical entities in need of protection, but also as potential biopolitical risks to the health and wellbeing of the family, the community, and by extension the nation at large. It will be shown that this presentation of certain children as risky, or dangerous, draws upon biopolitical logics, effectively depriving them of the protection of childhood. In other words, it will be argued that within the context of the war on drugs, perceptions of childhood and the protection of children is contingent on biopolitical factors. As will be outlined, this engages with and develops the work of J Marshall Beier on children as 'dangerous becomings', and Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian's (2019) concept of 'unchildling'.

The paper uses critical discourse analysis to analyse speeches by both Thaksin Shinawatra and Rodrigo Duterte, with particular attention paid to how they attempted to ascribe meaning to children in the context of the drug war (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 29). This further responds to the need raised by Evans (2010, 415) to consider how biopolitical discourses which uphold the 'strategisation/technologization of life for its own productive betterment' through concerns 'ordinarily associated with human development and progress' may indeed 'complement traditional security paradigms'. As Helen Berents (2019, 148) shows, children are 'rendered apolitical themselves, but their lives and bodies are politicised by others', so there is a need to consider how this politicisation can complement security paradigms. The article draws upon two complementary case studies to do this, as both the patterns of discourse and violence are comparable in both contexts. The case studies also contrast in significant ways, as in the Philippines the young were presented as to be protected and as threats to security. Although in the Thai case children were affected by losing a parent, and sometimes killed in cross fires, there was no apparent attempt to directly target the young either discursively, or literally. This

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contrasts with the Philippines, where a significant number of young people were killed, against a backdrop of the government attempting to lower the age of criminal responsibility, which will be analysed towards the end of the paper.

Rather than work within International Relations which usually aims to 'bring in' children as victims of security processes, here the interest is to unpack how children already help us to understand powerful ideational commitments (Beier, 2015), which in extreme cases, can facilitate widespread extrajudicial killings. What marks the two case studies being analysed here is that whilst the protection of children was presented as a defining reason for the need for violence to solve the drug war, children also were victimised by the same processes.

Consequently, this presents important questions about who is being secured by such processes, and the damaging consequences of political actors invoking the victim status of children in security contexts. In particular, as Wagnsson, Hellman and Holmberg (2010, 12) outline, there is a need to consider how the "non-agency" of children in security practices gives leverage to particular actors. Accordingly, this paper traces how childhood operates in security discourses in a more nuanced way than as pure victims or perpetrators of violence. Borrowing from Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2019, 1), here the interest is to consider the technologies of state violence in the war on drugs in relation to a biopolitical regime that serves to 'inscribe power over the bodies and lives of children'.

This paper is structured into four elements. Initially, an outline of the current literature on the Thai and Philippines war on drugs in relation to biopolitical childhood will be given. Here the literature which applies the biopolitics framework to southeast Asia will also be drawn upon. Following this, the second section will give an overview of the orthodox discourses of the war on drugs in the region, which present the necessity for violence to protect children. Drawing on Agamben, here the aim is to show how the war on drugs created a category of 'bare life' to be targeted along biopolitical lines. In the third section, this line of argument is developed further, by analysing how childhood in the war on drugs is presented as contingent on a range of biopolitics factors and imperatives, most notably the integrity of the future of the family and broader nation. Finally, in the fourth section, this contingent nature of childhood is surveyed in relation to the presentation of children as 'dangerous becomings'. In conjunction with this, the final section of this paper will examine how children have mobilised themselves to contest security practices, and reject the security narrative of the war on drugs, which opens up the use of extrajudicial violence. This responds to the need raised by Wagnsson, Hellman and Holmberg

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(2010, 2) to consider how children ‘take part in the making and breaking of security’ and can further inform ‘global security thinking’.

Literature Review: The war on drugs and the biopolitical state

The connections between the drug wars in Thailand and the Philippines has generated a small body of work across a number of disciplines, which identifies parallels between Thaksin and Duterte. In analysing how US counter terror priorities has influenced human rights in the Southeast Asian region, in his recent book, Regilme (2021) outlines the patterns of discourse that led to the Thai war on drugs, and anti-crime killings which took place under Rodrigo Duterte whilst he was mayor of Davao. Raffle (2021) has also compared the strategies employed by police acting in an unofficial capacity in both the Thai and Filipino war on drugs. Both Thaksin (Phongpaichit and Baker 2008) and Duterte (Kenny and Holmes 2020; Curato 2016) have been characterised as populists, with Lasco and Curato (2019) comparing the ‘medical populist’ style of both leaders, which they define as the invocation of public health crises to rally the people against the establishment. Significantly, Lasco and Curato (2019) argue that children represent an important component of medical populism, and use examples of both Thaksin and Duterte invoking simplified medical claims. Consequently, here the interest is to show how such discourses are deployed to justify violence towards those associated with drugs, and in rare cases, even against children themselves. This further builds on Beier’s (2022, 218) argument that as a ‘technology of global governance, childhood is regularly summoned as a powerful rhetorical resource in service of sovereign power’.

Although biopolitical readings of the state draw upon European models of governance from the 18th century onwards, a wide range of studies have applied it to state behaviour in Southeast Asia (Alidio 2016; Imbong, 2022; Voelkner 2011). However, the most relevant literature to the context under discussion here analyses the biopolitical state in Southeast Asia, and its entanglements with upland peoples (Dressler, 2019; Smith and Dressler, 2019), rebel groups (Brenner and Tazzioli, 2022), and women at risk of human trafficking (Voelkner, 2014). Brenner and Tazzioli’s (2022, 9) analysis of the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) in Myanmar demonstrates how the KIO’s public health campaigns represent a bid to create ‘an imagined community through biopolitical technologies that govern its subjects and their conducts’. Focusing on the *Pat Ja San* movement, which attempts to address drug use within Kachin society, they show how the KIA present drug use as a threat to the production of ‘bodily strong, mentally fit, and spiritually devout nationalist subjects’, who are able to support the biological production of the Kachin nation itself (Brenner and Tazzioli 2022, 9). Notably, the paper focuses on the

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youth, who 'inhabit a special place within biopolitical discourse' and the ways in which drugs are perceived as a threat to their future. Similarly, Voelkner (2014, 384) uses a Foucauldian lens to show how anti human trafficking campaigns in Vietnam sought to project traditional images of family and the "healthy, knowledgeable, skilful, dynamic, innovative, cultured and kind-hearted Vietnamese woman". Clearly, this has useful implications for analysing the position of children within understandings of national health in the Philippines and Thai war on drugs.

It is also worth outlining some of the postcolonial critiques that Brenner and Tazzioli (2022) engage with, most notably by Partha Chatterjee. Of particular relevance here is where Chatterjee (2014, 36) outlines how forms of governmentality predated the postcolonial nation state. Though Thailand was not formally colonised, this is particularly relevant to the Philippines, as much of the early stages of global drug prohibition were born out of American evangelists attempting to eradicate the opium trade in the colony (Wertz, 2013; Zarco, 1995). As Alfred McCoy (2009, 16) notes, this process in the Philippines up to 1946 was largely experimental and served to influence US domestic policymaking, but significantly created an 'interlocking regime of vice prohibition and paramilitary policing whose effect is still evident more than half a century after independence'. In short, the transnational nature of the prohibition movement bares a strong resemblance to Chatterjee's (2004, 37) reading of how governmental and biopolitical technologies were 'prompted and aided by international and nongovernmental organisations'. Drawing on Foucault, Chatterjee (2004, 34) argues that the legitimacy of power is drawn from a claim 'to provide for the well-being of the population', which is carried out via the surveillance and information gathering on various aspects of life. In a similar vein, Bashford (2006) argues that a global biopolitics of world health bodies operated beyond the level of nation. This involvement of NGOs and international organisations is also raised in Wolfram Dressler's (2019) account of the biopolitics of livelihoods among the Pala'wan uplanders in the southern Philippines. Specifically, Dressler (2019, 135) outlines how non-state actors 'discursively and materially classify, delimit, and reorder the uplands in terms of categories of difference and ideological control'. Although there is not space here to delineate the influence of the international drug prohibition regime on the governance of marginalised groups, both the Philippines and Thailand have been subject to similar pressures (McCoy, 2003, 413).

Before proceeding, there is a need to define how childhood is defined and applied descriptively in the context of this paper. Though at some stages the political actors cited here used other age-related terms, such as 'the young', or 'the youth', the most commonly used was 'children'. As

Beier (2015, 5) notes, this definition of childhood matters, as whether one is portrayed as 'within or without childhood bears critically on issues of agency, rights, protection, and more'. Largely, this paper takes as its starting point that the term children encompasses all those under the age of 18, as per the most widely held definition found in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Beier, 2015, 5; Linde, 2014, 564). In practice, globally understandings of childhood vary significantly, and the meaning of the term is widely agreed to be 'less a lived reality than an assigned concept' (Brocklehurst, 2015, 29); in other words, it represents a social construction (Linde, 2014). Further, as Helen Brocklehurst sets out, experiences of poverty can also render the concept of childhood redundant, and as will be set out shortly, may necessitate participation in the decidedly adult world of the drugs trade to survive. As a result of this, in part the intent of this paper is to delineate how security discourses unmake the concept of childhood in relation to those involved in the drug trade. It will be shown how childhood is presented as being contingent upon factors beyond the control of children involved in the drugs trade. Though the term youth is used occasionally by actors in this paper, it will be shown how this liminal stage between childhood and adulthood is often deployed to remind audiences of the potential danger that children could present. It is often the case that the subjects are children for the purposes of establishing their victim status, but youths when they demonstrate agency that may transgress biopolitical norms.

Killing for Children

Moral panics tying together children with the risk of illegal drugs are neither new, nor exclusive to any specific geographic region of the globe. However, the concern surrounding adult use of drugs and the ancillary effect on children rather coincides with nascent regimes of public health in the late 18th century, which Foucault (2008, 317) identified as a key component of the biopolitical state. As part of the United States Philippine Commission report on opium produced in 1905, interviews with doctors throughout the region demonstrated the commission's concern about uncovering whether opium was used by 'women and children'. Although answers to this varied, the commission rather sensationally concluded that 'nevertheless the sales of wives and children are frequently made in order to secure opium' (Carter, Albert and Brent 1906, 26). The US Philippine Commission is representative of the early colonial biopolitical state, as at the heart of such projects was the interest in improving the 'mental and physical well-being' of the colonial population, in order to improve its 'longevity, its environment, its productivity' and various other factors (De Larrinaga and Doucet 2008, 520). Such interventions were also clearly

guided by racist understandings of colonised and migrant populations (Nadelmann 1990, 506). In doing so however, the referent “womenandchildren” identified by Enloe (1993, 166) were upheld as a justification for state intervention as the most vulnerable social group to the influence of drugs.

The link between the risk of drugs and children was underscored by the proliferation of human security discourses in the late 1990s. As well as the plight of children being a recurring issue highlighted by the media, children have become central to development and post-conflict reconstruction programmes (Macmillan 2015, 62). Despite such explicit links made between human security, the issue of drugs, and the protection of children, academic literature on the subject has been sparse. The foundational 1994 report on Human Security specifically outlines threats to the personal security that are ‘directed at children based on their vulnerability and dependence’ (1994, 30). The report then continues to outline the explicit link between violent crime and the connection to drug trafficking. The drug trade is thus clearly articulated as a threat to human security (1994, 2). Prior to ideas of human security, the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is notable as it also emphasizes that states should ‘protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs’, but also ‘prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances’ (Barrett 2017, 263). Further, the CRC outlines this presentation of children as the ‘logical victim of drugs’ (Flacks 2018, 56) by multilateral organisations by the UN serves a dual purpose, in justifying action given the vulnerability of children, but rendering them objects of policymakers’ concern, who are unable to claim their own rights (Holzscheiter, 2020).

Despite the necessary attention for children as part of the emphasis on human security, it has also been suggested that this can undermine rights of other marginalised groups. As De Larrinaga and Doucet (2008) argue, discourses of human security further reinforce global biopolitical strategies, which further serve to reinforce the exercise of sovereign power by placing the health and welfare of populations as the referent. Whilst De Larrinaga and Doucet (2008) argue that such biopolitical narratives prepare the ground for the global war on terror, similar yet distinct processes make the case for the extrajudicial killing of citizens as part of the war on drugs. Drawing upon Agamben, they show how the sovereign creates zones where people ‘are barred from the law that governs normal society’, but equally are ‘subject to acts that acquire the force of law’ (2008, 522).

In a bid to nuance De Larrinaga and Doucet’s (2008, 520) line of enquiry, here the interest is to demonstrate how the sovereign ‘right to kill’ exists among Foucault’s (2004, 254) ‘power to

make live' in the war on drugs, rather than the former representing an archaic logic of security. Drawing on Agamben, Duschinski notes (2010, 114) that the state of exception is where 'the law provides for its own suspension and violation', where the biopolitical category of 'bare life' or the *homo sacer* 'can be killed and yet not sacrificed' (Agamben 1998, 8). Thus, in the state of exception 'bare life' is rendered 'devoid of rights, of history, of the capacity to speak' and the 'very idea of equal citizenship before the law is banished' (Jabri 2006). Significantly, such bare life can be defined biopolitically, as Agamben seeks to trace the 'biopolitical arrangements through which the state publically acknowledges the disposability of certain categories of the population' (Duschinski 2010, 115). The targeting of such categories are subsequently presented as an act of 'self-preservation of the community' (Norris 2000, 47). The problem that this presents is that whilst both Thai and Filipino drug wars largely led to the killing of adults, the same discourses of biopolitical exclusion also served to put children at risk, as they are presented as being most susceptible to replicating patterns of problematic behaviour. Before proceeding however, it is necessary to outline how both Duterte and Thaksin articulated the risk of drugs to children, and used this as a key justification for violence in order to 'make life live'.

The necessity to kill those associated with drugs and the protection of children is perhaps one of the most omnipresent aspects of Duterte's speeches on the drug war. This argument was set out early in his presidency during an interview with Al-Jazeera (2016) in formulaic terms- as the drug trade serves to 'destroy' the country, by extension, Duterte suggested, 'if you destroy our young children, I will kill you'. The following year, in the annual Presidential State of the Nation Address (SONA), Duterte doubled down on this, by addressing all drug dealers and declaring that if 'you harm the children on whose hands the future of this Republic is entrusted and I will hound you to the very gates of hell' (Rappler 2017). Duterte also reiterated this threat to children; at an event hosted at the Malacañang Palace for the Scouts, he threatened that 'I will kill people if they destroy our children', whilst emphasizing that he was 'really strict' (Ranada 2017). By comparison, Thaksin was less explicit in calling for the deaths of drug dealers, but in a similar fashion continually linked the issue of extrajudicial killing to that of children. When threatening to send Thai soldiers into Myanmar in order to dismantle drugs factories in Wa State with a 'shoot to kill' order, Thaksin retorted that 'their drugs have gradually killed our children, so we won't spare them' (The Nation 2003). Similarly, Thaksin also claimed that as drug dealers were 'ruthless to our children...being ruthless to them is not a bad thing', so if there were 'deaths among traders, its normal' (The Nation 2007).

Both Duterte and Thaksin also used the threat to children as a means to rebuff criticism of alleged extrajudicial killings. Thaksin argued that ‘critics of the campaign should now direct their empathy to our children who are victims of the drug menace, instead of sounding the alarm for falling traffickers’ (The Nation 2003a). He further reiterated that he could not ‘understand why some people are so concerned about them while neglecting to care for the future of one million children who are being lured into becoming drug-users’ (The Nation 2003a). As will be outlined further later, this characterisation of the threat of drugs is telling; Thaksin clearly suggested that the harm towards children resulted from becoming drugs users themselves. A similar message is implied by Duterte, but with the added subtext that once children became involved with drugs, they would be irreparably ‘destroyed’. In addition, this presentation of young people serves to highlight how the discourses of the drug war not only justify violence, but simultaneously rob them of agency. Echoing this, during his 2018 SONA, Duterte declared that ‘your concern is human rights, mine is human lives’, before going on to link this to the threat to children (Rappler 2018). Although this statement was situated amidst a pledge to improve the material realities of those at ‘society’s fringes’, the distinction between human lives of the children which are worth saving, and the bare life of those involved in the drug trade is notable. Most recently, in the 2021 SONA, in response to the increasing interest of the International Criminal Court in the war on drugs, Duterte reiterated ‘those who destroy the young people of our country, I will kill you’ (Rappler 2021). Having established how both drug wars used the threat to children to justify violence, the following section will trace how childhood was presented as contingent on a range of biopolitical factors, and the potential threat of children was articulated by both leaders.

Biopolitical Childhood in the war on drugs

Childhood is central to ideas of biopolitics. Drawing on ideas from lectures in 1976 and expounded further in a series of lectures at the College de France between 1978 and 1979, Foucault (1976; 2004, 254) argued that the function of biopower from the 18th century onwards was to ‘improve life, to prolong its duration, to improve its chances, to avoid accident, and to compensate for failings’. Accordingly, as Rose (2007, 22) notes, biopolitics further entails the inculcation among the general population ‘the maintenance and promotion of personal, childhood and familial health’, and with it the authorities ‘own hopes, fears and anxieties’. Such fears are numerous, but drugs in particular ‘epitomise the risk posed to the ‘normal’ biological progression of the child’ (Flacks 2018, 57). The link between the interventions of the biopolitical state and children have been set out in some detail by Karen Wells (2011), who argues that

modern conceptions of childhood coincide with biopolitical governance. This shift brought with it new philanthropic concerns regarding children and the unique ‘capacities and vulnerabilities’ they present (Wells 2011, 16). The notion of the development and progression of the child is partly rooted in their status as a ‘social resource for the future’ in addition to their vulnerability and fragility (Beier 2015, 4).

As Beier (2015, 4) notes, rather less attention within International Relations is afforded to situations where the young are occasionally also presented as possible threats to security as ‘dangerous or potentially dangerous becomings’. This danger stems from two contradictory logics of childhood that Macmillan (2009, 38) identifies. The first of these is that childhood has an ‘innate innocence’, which over time society serves to corrupt. Simultaneously, drawing upon Stainton-Rogers (2001), Macmillan (2009, 38) suggests that the second logic presents childhood as being characterised by ‘an inherently evil nature that society must subjugate’. On top of these two logics, Helen Berents (2015, 95) notes that when children do not conform to passive, irrational, and vulnerable norms, they can also be rendered to be ‘dangerous and delinquent’. Occasionally, this dangerous nature is rhetorically tied to older childhood, as ‘youth’ in common English usage is associated with ‘pejorative adult capabilities, notably in terms of the threat of physical strength and potential criminality’ (Brocklehurst 2006, 1).

This tendency to represent children in a binary fashion as being either victims or dangerous criminals is explored by Thompson et al (2017), Atkinson-Sheppard (2017), Berents (2015), and Ursin (2020). Atkinson-Sheppard (2017) shows how Bangladeshi criminal gangs or *mastaans* employ street children to undertake an array of criminal activities, who in return receive protection. Rather than seeing such street children as exploited victims or malicious criminals, Atkinson-Sheppard (2017) argues that they should be viewed as doing what they must to survive. Although not uniform to child soldiers, similar reasons of poverty have also been suggested as to why young girls joined armed groups in the Philippines, Angola, Sri Lanka, and Columbia (Keairns 2003). Specifically, as Keairns (2003) notes, girls in the Philippines joined armed groups as a way to escape poverty and poor working conditions with little to no pay. With reference to girl soldiers, Fox (2004, 477) suggests that despite the clear moral problems it presents, the ability of non-state armed groups to ‘empower girls with education, training, and weapons’ is symptomatic of the inability of the state to provide human security.

Berents (2015, 91) describes comparable processes in Columbia, where the violent and unpredictable nature of urban life has led the young to ‘find new ways of coping with violence and insecurity’. Clearly, for some young people whose childhoods do not conform with

prescribed (and often Western) archetypes, participating in crime is a means of survival, and involvement in the drugs trade is one of the most common ways to do this. Accordingly, state responses have then also targeted the young, with one in five homicides in Rio De Janeiro during 2015 being undertaken by the police, often targeting young black men (Ursin 2020, 330). Watson (2020, 247) highlights the differentiation between how children of colour are often imbued with adult characteristics in political discourse long before their white counterparts. Issues of race further interact with gender and class dynamics to influence perceptions of adulthood. As Ursin (2020, 333) shows, in the Brazilian context, the debates surrounding state responses to the drug trade are perceived as 'adult endeavours', and as a result 'the violent death of young favelados was often perceived as ordinary and common sense', as 'part of the natural order of things'. Although not discounting the influence of race and religion (see Espinosa 2016, 316) in the two contexts under analysis here, it will be shown that poverty and economic necessity were prominent in the portrayal of children as threatening.

Levels of child poverty in the Philippines are similarly related to the drug trade. As of 2018, around 16.7% of the population of the Philippines lived below the national poverty line, and 30.3% percent of children under 5 were physically stunted (Asian Development Bank 2021). Though varying significantly by region, according to UNICEF (2015, 12), in 2009 around 16 in every 100 children in the country lived below the food poverty line. Among those most at risk of poverty and most vulnerable are street children. As Njord et al. (2010) demonstrate, street children are 5.5 times more likely to use illegal drugs to their counterparts who are not homeless. Related to this, such children are often recruited by drugs gangs, who use them as 'runners' for selling drugs (Rauhala 2017). As will be discussed later, this was one of the foremost justifications offered by the Philippines government for attempting to lower the age of criminal responsibility from 15 to 9 (Rauhala 2017). This aside, perhaps the most common way for children to be directly affected by the drug war in the Philippines was through the death of a parent. As Ofreneo et al. (2022) note, as well as the damaging psychological effects of losing a parent, children were also faced with the economic difficulties of losing the main household provider. In many cases, this had knock on effects on schooling and their position among their peers, because of a perception of family criminality (Ofreneo et al. 2022). Consequently, as with the work of Ursin (2020), Berents (2015), and Atkinson-Sheppard (2017) outlined above, here the interest is to show how the discourses of the war on drugs only extended to certain groups of children. Further it will show how the killing of children as part of the war on drugs was presented as necessary collateral damage.

Another element of the protection of children is their characterisation by the discourses of the war on drugs as ‘apprentice citizens’, who are not able to participate politically owing to their social status (Wyness, Harrison and Buchanan 2004, 84). Wells (2011, 17) highlights how the ability to contribute to society is informed by biopolitical ‘mechanics of life’ governance, whereby from the eighteenth century onwards, state institutions such as schools and juvenile courts were established to govern the conduct of the young. This further led to a concern about the health of the young during the 20th century, where the demands of war and colonization necessitated a state of healthy and productive adults (Wells, 2011). Brocklehurst (2009, 5) notes how an element of this was the recognition that children required ‘separate protection and healthcare until they are physiologically less vulnerable’. As Wyness, Harris and Buchanan (2004, 85) further outline, today the notion that the apprentice status of children rests on the idea that they are ‘socially and morally incompetent’. Such notions of incompetence further reinforce the idea raised by Burridge and McSorley (2015, 10) that children represent a legitimate site for intervention, especially when issues of health impact US military recruitment. The war on drugs in Southeast Asia was little different in presenting children as emblematic of the nation’s health as a whole, and thus corruption of this was consequently an attack on the future of the nation itself.

Duterte (2017, 10) was explicit in highlighting importance of the drug war in preventing potential damage to the ‘young Filipinos’ as ‘they are our only assets’ (Valente 2017), and in a separate speech noted how drug dealers harmed ‘the children in whose hands the future of this republic is entrusted’ (Rappler 2017). He reiterated such ideas to children in speeches, outlining how ‘what becomes of today’s youth will determine what becomes of our country in the future’. By extension, Duterte argued, it was critical to address ‘corruption, illegal drugs and criminality’, which serve to ‘destroy the foundations of our country’ (Valente 2017a). Thaksin similarly emphasized the importance of the health of children in urging provincial authorities to organise sporting events so that children would ‘love health’. Further, Thaksin (2003, 5) argued, if children learned to participate in sport, they ‘wont get involved in vice’, allowing society to be orderly where ‘everyone falls back in line’. The biopolitical messaging inherent within this is clear, as Thaksin presents living healthily to be part of the same process of establishing an ‘orderly society’ through discipline. The importance of uncertainty as a component of Jennifer Mitzen’s (2006) concept of ontological security is also worth noting here. As with the case of the Kachin youth mentioned earlier, it could be suggested that Thaksin and Duterte’s concern with

uncertain nature of the future of the nation's children maps closely onto her notion of uncertainty threatening 'identity security' (Mitzen 2006, 342). As an extension to this, it could be suggested that as part of the drug war, both states became attached to conflict, over the 'unsettling condition of deep insecurity' (Mitzen 2006, 342).

More than this however, by upholding the young as a prized societal referent, the discourses of the war on drugs deployed a kind of 'medical populism' identified by Lasco and Curato (2019), which forges divisions against dangerous others by deploying simplified medical knowledge claims. This performance of crisis is then used to justify violence towards so called 'addicts, malevolent 'others', or 'outsiders' who benefit from the drug trade' (Lasco 2020, 2). More strikingly, Duterte characterised drugs users as zombies who 'no longer have the cognitive value' of ordinary people as '*shabu* use would shrink the brain of a person' (Villaneuva 2016). As he argued that this would render them 'no longer viable for rehabilitation', they would therefore be 'of no use to society any more' (Villaneuva 2016). Whilst in this context, Duterte was not referring specifically to the young, he would later apply a similar argument to them. Addressing students in 2015, Duterte suggested that as six months of drug use would cause irreversible brain damage, 'there is no such thing as a successful rehabilitation (for a drug addict)' (Manila Times 2015).

Duterte also reiterated the irreversible nature of drug use to parents by suggesting that 'once you lose a child to drugs, you lose him forever' (Manila Times 2015). Duterte later returned to the responsibilities of parents of those associated with drugs once he was elected, suggesting that 'if you know of any addicts, go ahead and kill them yourself as getting their parents to do it would be too painful' (The Guardian 2016). This pledge was given further authenticity when Duterte requested that his son be murdered if allegations about involvement in the drug trade were found to be true, 'so people will not have anything to say' (Embury-Dennis 2017). The biopolitical form of such arguments is clear; in rendering drug users as 'incurably lost' and as 'life devoid of value' (Agamben 1998, 138), such discourses clear the way for violence and extrajudicial killing of suspects. In arguing that child drugs users were 'lost forever', Duterte was effectively attempting to decide 'on the value or nonvalue of life' (Agamben 1998, 142) through biopolitical logics. As will be shown in the final section of this paper, this removal of the status of 'apprentice citizens' (Wyness, Harrison and Buchanan 2004, 84) for children who may have used drugs speaks to the biopolitical fragility of their position.

Though neither Thaksin nor Duterte linked the health of children to military recruitment, as in the case examined by Burrige and McSorley (2015), they did tie it to the ability of the nation to

compete in the global economy. In the *Birth of Biopolitics* lecture series, Foucault argued that biopolitics entails applying economic analysis to 'a series of objects, to domains of behaviour or conducts which were not market forms of behaviour or conduct', such as 'marriage, the education of children, and criminality' (1979, 268). As the *homo economicus* represents an individual who 'responds systematically to systematic modifications artificially introduced to the environment' to Foucault (1979, 270), such citizens were 'eminently governable'. This logic is thus applicable to the discourses of the war on drugs in these cases here, whereby the effects of drugs upon society are characterised as having an effect on the economic stability of people's lives, and therefore the nation at large. The extension of this argument is that as drugs render children incurably lost, they prevent nation from being competitive in the global economy. The multiple issues of poverty, development, and crime which influence levels of drug use are marginalised in the place of seeing the economic potential of the young ahead of all else.

Thaksin was particularly explicit in presenting 'children's brains' as 'the nation's biggest asset' (The Nation 2001). Again this evidences the 'medical populist' discourse displayed by Duterte above, whereby all drug use is presented as having deleterious effects on the cognitive ability of children. Further, this language also blurs the distinction between those who may have used drugs rarely over the course of their lives, and regular users who are dependent, a technique used by Duterte to distort the level of threat to the population at large (Gallagher, Raffle and Maulana 2020, 256). Thaksin's preoccupation with the brains of children resurfaced a number of times, most notably in his speech announcing the drug suppression policy in January 2003, where he argued:

I think we have tolerated too much already, and now the country's youth has been very badly damaged. We are entering the age of the knowledge society, but the brains of the nation's youth are being destroyed (Shinawatra 2003, 1).

Again, this explicitly links the competitiveness of the Thai economy, the young, and the effect of drugs on the two. Duterte was also clear in linking regional competitiveness and the young to issues of drugs. In a speech at the World Economic Forum in Cambodia in 2017, Duterte sought to highlight that 'the ASEAN youth are among the best and most creative, intelligent and innovative in the world', so states should seek to empower them (Valente 2017b). However, he continued that:

But we cannot turn a blind eye on the scourge of illegal drugs that threatens our youth and the future of our societies. We need to take a committed stand to dismantle and destroy the illegal drugs trade apparatus (Valente 2017b).

Consequently, rather than engaging with issues of education itself, both Duterte and Thaksin presented the brains of children as referents of security that were above all threatened by drugs. It is significant that in speaking of children who may have already taken drugs, both leaders appear to use the term youth with a greater degree of frequency than when speaking of the victimised child. As is clear from the excerpts used above, much of this rhetoric was addressed to parents, as the family is seen as a critical site of intervention for biopolitics. It is to this issue that this section now turns.

The importance of the family in biopolitically securing the young is a theme that Foucault (1979/2008, 66) linked to a 'culture of danger'. Rather than the four 'horsemen of the apocalypse', Foucault (1979/2008, 66) outlined how in the nineteenth century 'everyday dangers appear' such as crime, disease and hygiene were 'perpetually being brought to life, re-actualized, and circulated'. These fears were rooted in a fear of 'degeneration of the individual, the family, the race, and the human species' (Foucault 1979/2008, 66). Such biopolitical logics are evidenced in the speeches of both Duterte and Thaksin, who sought to emphasize how drugs both represented a threat to the family. Notably however, rather than simply blaming the destruction of families on parents involved in the drugs trade, both leaders sought to emphasize the risk to the children of all by appealing directly to parents to support the drug war. For instance, during an inaugural speech of his drug war in January 2003, Thaksin argued that 'if we think about parents sending their children to school just for them to get drugs and aids, we have to feel their devastation' (Shinawatra 2003, 5). School as a critical site of intervention continually resurfaced during the drug war in Thailand; at various stages Thaksin claimed that anywhere between 700,000 to 3 million children used drugs (Shinawatra 2003, 2). Such statistics were based on surveys of secondary school students, conducted by the Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB), which suggested more than half had tried methamphetamine in the form of *yaba* at least once (Phongpaichit and Baker 2004, 160). However, the ONCB later admitted that all data on methamphetamine imports was largely guesswork and only around 400,000 took it once a month or more (Phongpaichit and Baker 2004, 160). As Chouvy and Meissonnier (2004, 65) note, it is also important to view the figures on supposed drug use among school students in global context- in 2003 drug use among the Thai children was still lower than in Europe and far lower than their counterparts in North America or Australia.

In a similar fashion, in his 2018 SONA, Duterte set out that ‘the lives of our youth are being wasted and families are destroyed, all because of the chemicals called *shabu* (methamphetamine), cocaine, cannabis, and heroine [sic]’ (Rappler 2018). It is noteworthy here that again Duterte opts for the term youth over children, associating them with the drug use that is apparently wasting their lives. Again, this was a reiteration of the same theme outlined in his SONA of 2017, where he claimed he would ‘not allow the ruin of the youth, the disintegration of families and the retrogression of communities, forced by criminals whose greed for money is insatiable as it is devoid of moral purpose’ (Rappler 2017). Although not directly identifying children as the cause of disintegration of families, Duterte did depict them as agents who could ‘ruin’ the family unit and communities. Consequently, the case made for violence towards those associated with drugs was framed in biopolitical terms, as the young were presented as vulnerable to the ‘everyday dangers’ that lead to ‘degeneration’ as a whole. This notion of children as agents of ruin, who have fallen victim to everyday dangers will consequently be the issue that this paper turns to next.

Presenting Children as dangerous

As outlined above, one of the concerns of this paper is to trace the discourses which present children as the referent objects of protection in the war on drugs, but simultaneously open the possibility of them being targeted. Consequently, there is a need to examine the circumstances where some children are presented as worthy of protection, whilst others lose the same protections that childhood brings. As discussed earlier in the paper, work by Berents (2015), Macmillan (2009) and Atkinson-Sheppard (2017) has already drawn out the problem of how children can be presented as a danger. This notion that children may possess ‘negative agency’, over ‘positive agency’ is clear in cases where states hold children responsible for crimes when they are generally seen as too young to contribute to society (Watson, 2006, 247). According to security discourses, this form of negative agency that presents children as ‘dangerous beings’ is a process governed by corruption through ‘nefarious forces’, as in the case of child soldiers, or the lack of regulation, as with ‘deviant youths’ (Beier 2015, 8). However, this agential emphasis forecloses the possibility that a designation of dangerousness may be related to uncontrollable biopolitical factors. This is well captured by Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2019, 124), whose concept of ‘unchilding’ centres race as the key defining factor which serves to ‘create, transform, and construct children as dangerous others’.

Much like in the cases examined here, Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2019, 1) outlines two narratives of Palestinian children that the Israeli state articulates: one where they represent ‘victims of their

own (inferior/uncivilised) pathologies', and the other where they are depicted as the 'born-terrorist'. Consequently, unchilding operates biopolitically within 'wombs, families, friendships, homes, schools, hospitals', but simultaneously through 'vicious genocidal criminalities' (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2019, 17). The purpose of this to Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2019, 17) is to 'annihilate the future generations of the native'. Though dynamics of the case studies analysed here have some marked differences from this, not least the importance of race, the operational logics Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2019) draws out are applicable. Consequently, this section will nuance the concepts of 'dangerous becomings' and 'unchilding' in relation to one another by showing how the drug wars drew upon the biopolitical 'sanctioning the life of one by dispossessing the other' (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2019, 129).

The biopolitical logic of presenting children as potentially dangerous was clearest in the Philippines. As well as presenting the young as agents of the drug trade, Duterte also sought to lower the age of criminal responsibility in order to target those associated with drugs. The bill to amend the Juvenile Justice Act of 2006 was passed by the Philippines House of Representatives in January 2019 and sought to lower the age of criminal responsibility from 15 to the age of 12 (Lalu 2019). The bill remains at the Committee reading stage in the Philippines senate. Although proponents of the bill highlighted that the proposed age of criminal responsibility was not too far out of step with other countries, supporters explicitly linked the need for the bill to drug related crime perpetrated by the young (Baldwin and Marshal 2017). As the 2006 Act had already been amended in 2013 to lower the age of criminal liability to 12 for serious crimes like murder, the primary justification offered in support of the bill was that it would clamp down on children involved in the drug trade (Elemia 2016). Co-author of the bill Fredenil Castro, who had originally proposed that children become responsible for such crimes aged 9, justified the change by highlighting that children could be 'in cahoots with drug users, with drug pushers, and others who are related to the drug trade' (Baldwin and Marshal 2017).

President Rodrigo Duterte was highly supportive of the bill, arguing in December 2016 that 'we produce a generation of criminals', as alongside other things, children were learning to become drug runners (Baldwin and Marshal 2017). This was an argument that Duterte continually reiterated during his presidency. In January 2019 during a speech in Lucena City, Quezon, Duterte outlined how 'if there is a resident looking for drugs, they will bring it to them and collect payment', then the 'kids would get their fix themselves' (Valente 2019). Duterte would then suggest that such drugs runners could often be as young as six years old (Valente 2019). More than just being involved with drugs however, Duterte further criticised the Juvenile Justice

and Welfare act by declaring that ‘you really cannot detain a child whatever the crime may be- it can even be genocide’ (Adel 2018). Duterte (2019, 5) later built upon this whilst criticising the 2006 law in a speech in Caloocan City, arguing that as the law lets the young off ‘scot-free’ they would ‘go in and out’ of prison, regardless of whether ‘they steal, they kill, they rape and kill’. Such claims were part of a broader characterisation of children as potentially dangerous, where Duterte outlined how ‘crimes can make human cesspools of succeeding generations’ (UNTV 2017). Such ‘human cesspools’ were facilitated, according to Duterte, by the permissiveness of the Juvenile Justice Act that had ‘produced people who are of criminal minds’, ‘now that they have grown older’ (UNTV 2017).

Such a broad attempt to change the age of criminal responsibility hints at a latent logic in Duterte’s rhetoric, that in participating in the drug trade, children surrendered any claim to protection that this would bring. Hence, Duterte’s association of children with crimes most often perpetrated by adults such as murder, rape, and genocide, effectively served to unchild them, even though participation within the drug trade for children is often dictated by poverty above all else. By extension, Duterte presented childhood as contingent upon proximity to drugs, and therefore often poverty. It is also worth considering that even before the state intervened, the situation many such children found themselves in entailed a loss of childhood.

The evocation of the innocent child at risk to drugs was also one that ultimately backfired for both Thaksin and Duterte. In Thaksin’s case, opposition to the drug war coalesced around the theme of the risk posed to children by state killing and the violence fostered by the campaign. Nine year old Chakraphan Srisa-ard was killed in February 2003 by police, who opened fire on the car his mother was driving (HRW 2003). The court case played out publicly, finally culminating in July 2011 with the criminal court charging three police officers with recklessness, ultimately leading to the child’s death (Bangkok Post 2013). The charging of the police officers also served to discredit the police’s argument that such killings were the product of gang members silencing one another (Mydans 2003). Following this, several other reported accidental killings of children took place, including that of a sixteen-month-old baby in the arms of her mother (HRW, 2003). Whilst there was evidence of public revulsion in reaction to the killings of the children within Thailand, support for the drug war remained consistently high overall (Roberts et al 2004). It seems relatively clear that in Thailand children were not directly targeted in the same way they were in the Philippines. Though this may indicate a limit to the usefulness of comparative analysis, it is noteworthy that up to this point the patterns of

discourse remained remarkably similar, indicating how biopolitical discourses can open up the possibility of violence in other contexts.

In the Philippines however, the killing of young people presented a real challenge to the drug war and Duterte presidency. The killing of seventeen-year-old Kian delos Santos in August 2017 in Caloocan City demonstrated the role of the police in such violence, significantly undermining the legitimacy of the campaign, at least in the short term. The Philippine National Police (PNP) claimed that whilst conducting another operation late at night in the Barangay, delos Santos opened fire on them, prompting them to return fire, ultimately killing the seventeen-year-old (Cahiles 2017). PNP chief Ronald dela Rosa maintained that delos Santos was a drug runner for his family, although it later emerged that the police had staged the arrest of a witness after killing delos Santos (Buan 2017). After the killing, police planted a gun along with packets of *shabu* on delos Santos's body (Buan 2017). CCTV footage later showed the plainclothes police officers dragging the still living delos Santos to a back alley, undermining their argument that there was a shootout. Ballistics tests also showed that they executed him from a distance of 60cm (Buan 2018; Torres-Tupas 2017). Although three officers were found guilty of murder, the high-profile nature of the case meant that delos Santos's murder became a rallying call for opposition of the drug war, with over 1000 people attending his funeral procession to demand justice for the victims of extrajudicial killing (De Castro and Marshall, 2017). The case was widely reported by the media and polling by Pulse Asia (2017) showed that 94% of respondents were aware of the case of Kian delos Santos, and partly as a result of this 76% were concerned that a member of their family, a relative, or an acquaintance may meet a similar fate to the teenager, owing to the strategies of the government.

Significantly, the killing of Kian delos Santos also contradicted Duterte's earlier argument that the killing of children as part of the drug war were regrettable 'collateral damage' (Holmes 2016). Duterte had sought to draw equivalence between children killed by the United States in Vietnam and Afghanistan as part of bombing raids, posing the question 'why do you say it is collateral damage to the west and to us its murder?' (Holmes, 2016). As Allinson (2015, 120) has shown in his examination of how acceptable collateral damage in drone warfare is perceived to be, biopolitical 'patterns of life' were critical in defining whose deaths are permissible during the Uruzgan incident in Afghanistan. One of the most critical of such criteria deployed by target screeners, was whether potential targets represented children or adolescents. Though there was no agreed distinction between children and adolescents beyond the latter potentially being dangerous, this was enough to justify fatal action. Beier (2022, 218) has similarly analysed how

the legitimacy of acts of political violence are often dictated by how different targets are coded by gender and age to assess danger and risk.

This process of biopolitical identification mirrors the process at play in the Philippines, as clearly efforts were made by police to present children as having the potential to play a role in the drug economy, which may require violence. This was further borne out by the planting of a gun on the body of Delos Santos. As Berents notes (2019, 146), though collateral damage has always been considered an aspect of the conduct of conflict in international politics, the killing of children poses important questions when ‘they are thrust on the scene in a way that is unexpected or taboo’. The case of Kian Delos Santos also demonstrates the how the liminal stage of later childhood reveals the biopolitical logic of killings in the Philippine drug war. The act of framing Delos Santos as a member of a drug gang sought to unchild him after the fact, in order to legitimise the actions of the police who killed him. It is revealing that association with violence through the planting of a gun was not seen as enough alone to unchild him, and the decision was also taken to place *shabu* packets on his body. In conjunction with one another, these objects of evidence were therefore placed to suggest undesirable ‘patterns of life’.

The high-profile murder of Carl Arnaiz aged 19 and Reynaldo de Guzman aged 14 during the drug war by police further shows the tendency for police to target poor males (OMCT 2020, 15) who occupied the liminal space between childhood and adulthood (Boiser, 2023; Bolledo, 2022). As with the patterns of life used in determining targets in drone strikes (Allinson, 2015), being a male and in the latter stages of childhood was therefore enough to present them as dangerous. In contrast to this image of danger, delos Santos’s father highlighted that his son did ‘not know anything except studying’, and that he ‘worked hard because he wanted to get out of poverty, but they killed him just like that’ (Torres-Tupas, 2017). Research by the OMCT (2020, 11) has shown that the majority of children victims of the drug war were neglected, out of school, formerly deprived of liberty, or were living in poor areas.

Accordingly, the characterisation of the death of children as ‘collateral damage’ consequently became a cause around which opposition to Duterte, especially from children, coalesced. This is demonstrative of the ability of children to play active roles in security processes (Watson 2020, 252), something which is often given short shrift within International Relations scholarship (Wagnsson, Hellman, and Holmburg, 2010). A movement of several political youth groups came together to form the #youthresist movement in July 2017, announcing that they refused ‘to stop asking for a say into our officials’ decisions’ (Lopez 2017). Thirteen year old school student Shabby De Guzman attacked Duterte and the war on drugs, declaring that ‘we reject the notion

that the loss of lives can be simplified as collateral damage' (Lopez 2017). In August of the same year, youth groups held a *Revolt for Kian* rally at the People Power Monument in Quezon City. Speaking at the rally, *Akbayan Youth* member Shamah Bungasin highlighted that most extrajudicial killings took place 'in the [economically] depressed areas', as relatives of victims would not be able to produce evidence due to their poverty (Talabong 2017). Similarly, Karla Yu of the *Millennials Against Dictators* group suggested that 'all of the victims in this war on drugs are poor, voiceless people, who cannot talk back to the president and tell him, enough of this' (Talabong 2017). Such interventions by children in youth groups are significant, as they demonstrate an attempt not only to extend the moral and political voice of the young, but also a rejection of their status as victims of the drug trade. In protesting about the killing of Kian Delos Santos and others, the young sought to reject their status as victims or collateral damage of the war on drugs, instead asserting their right to challenge a government that they see as having victimised the poor.

Whilst there is no evidence of attempts to tally the number of children killed as part of the Thai war on drugs, the scale of the police killings in the Philippines suggests more than it being a case of being caught in the crossfire. The *World Organisation Against Torture* (OMCT 2020) and the Philippines Children's Legal Rights and Development Centre have demonstrated that at least 122 killings of children took place between July 2016 and December 2019. Such totals are a minimum the OMCT warn, as many relatives of the victims were too afraid to come forward for fear of reprisal. The victims were aged between one and seventeen years old, and were either direct targets often as they had witnessed other killings, were victims of mistaken identity, were killed as proxies for others, or were killed as 'collateral damage' in crossfires (OMCT 2020: 2). Significantly, the report also outlined that 38.5% of the killing were carried out by the police themselves, whereas 61.5% were carried out by unknown assailants, some with 'direct links to the police' (OMCT 2020, 1). Youth groups responded to this by renewing attacks on Duterte, directing their retort directly to the president- 'the one destroying the young people of the Philippines is you' (Anakbayan-USA 2020). This remains a powerful critique of the drug war in the Philippines, as it has demonstrably undermined the physical and economic security of the young, with little evidence that it has reduced crime.

Conclusion

In tracing the discourses surrounding children in the Thai and Philippines wars on drugs, this paper has shown how childhood can be presented in a way that renders it to be contingent upon biopolitical calculations. As a result, this paper aims to further nuance the orthodox picture of

childhood within security discourses and International Relations scholarship, which often serves to portray children in a binary fashion as either victims or criminals (Thompson et al, 2017). In doing so, the article initially sets out how children are upheld as the 'logical victims' in the global war on drugs, in a way that is not sensitive to the plurality of childhoods experienced worldwide and the agency of individuals within the context of poverty. This section also establishes how both Thaksin and Duterte were clear about the necessity for violence towards those associated with drugs. Following this, the paper shows how biopolitical imperatives linked together children and drugs with the health and future of the family, community, and nation. It is shown how childhood is envisaged as a critical stage of intervention where biopolitical notions of life are instilled, for the future economic capability of both states. Finally, the fourth section outlines where children allegedly transgress beyond biopolitical norms to represent 'dangerous becomings', rendering them vulnerable to the same biopolitical discourses which upheld their protection. Drawing on Shalhoub-Kevorkian's notion of 'unchilding', this section further shows how childhood itself can be portrayed as contingent on biopolitical factors, as was the case in the Philippines.

This article also addresses the ways in which childhood 'innocence equates with vulnerability' within the discourses of the war on drugs, and this in turn leads to political figures speaking on behalf of the young (Wyness, Harrison and Buchanan 2004, 85). Critically, in the context of the drug war in the Philippines, this process of speaking on behalf of the young, ostensibly for their protection, facilitated an environment where their rights were undermined. This further expands Watson's (2015) argument that presenting the young as victims of security processes is counterproductive, as their status of putative victims of the drug war further facilitated an environment where the state can target behaviours that they may engage in. As a result, there is a need in security studies and international relations more broadly to engage with the ways in which young people may contest their victim status and in doing so actively seek to remake security discourses. Significantly, as shown here, youth groups in the Philippines sought to challenge state discourses by demonstrating how the costs of the drug war were unevenly borne by the poor. This responds to the need within international relations to further problematize how children are presented in security processes beyond being mute victims to the politics of their elders.

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