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**Telling Geopolitical Tales: Temporality, Rationality, and the Childish in the  
Ongoing War for the Falklands-Malvinas Islands**

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**Biographical Note**

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## **Abstract**

Anniversaries of war often present opportunities for the telling and retelling of tales about the geopolitical; tales of a nation's sovereignty, its identity, its security, and how these are imagined and reimagined through the notion of specific conflicts, their histories, beginnings, ends and aftermaths. By examining the case of the ongoing 'war' over the Falklands-Malvinas, and a particular set of stories where the 'childish' has come to characterise relations and differences between Britain and Argentina, this paper explores how the temporality of 'the anniversary' can enable certain claims, about the rationality of war, as a means of safeguarding sovereignty, identity and security, to become common sensical. The paper argues that more attention should be paid to geopolitical tales of supposedly 'adult' and 'childish' characters because these constructions have the potential to normalise violence as a common-sensical act of strong, adult nations; as an integral part of their national stories that obscures the aggressive role of the state in normalising and perpetuating violence.

**Keywords:** Falklands-Malvinas; childishness; temporality; identity, sovereignty; security

## **Introduction: Telling Geopolitical Tales**

Anniversaries, particularly those marking the outbreak or cessation of wars, present significant opportunities for the telling of geopolitical tales and the reproduction of geopolitical 'truths'. As markers of an 'event' in which questions and performances of sovereignty, territory, security and national identity invariably coalesce, anniversaries of war are never just recurrent dates in the calendar where 'the past' is consciously brought into the present; they are always productive of political and social relations.

As a calendric feature, all anniversaries “arise from, and are perpetuated by, social requirements”; their meaning and marking relies on common, social and mutually held understandings of time and its significance to the collective (Sorokin & Merton 1937: 626). As examples of what Sorokin and Merton (1937) call ‘social time’, war anniversaries can provide “opportunities for remembrance and recreation that cut across and reinvent time” (Hutchings 2007: 72), whilst simultaneously producing temporal boundaries and distinctions about the nature of the past, present and future (Lundborg 2012). Anniversaries of war often nurture attempts to ‘fix’ the meaning of the practices of violence conjured into memory, practices that, though neither temporally nor spatially stable, often constitute the shifting foundations on which claims about national boundaries, roles and identities are frequently built (Edkins 2003; Till 2003). Anniversaries of war may also foster stories that justify and legitimate the death and violence the events they mark entailed (Dodds 1993) and more often than not, they are characterised by political discourses that seek to affirm an imagined past or pasts regarded as “useful for justifying present interests” (Staudinger in Wodak *et al* 2009:70).

In light of the productive and social characteristics of anniversaries, and given that people frequently attach a distinctive significance to any calendric date “that is in any way outstanding” (Forrest 1993:445), it is perhaps unsurprising that recent anniversaries of the 1982 Falklands-Malvinas War have marked renewed and reinvigorated rounds of (ongoing) tale-telling by British, Argentinian and Islander representatives, officials, politicians, media and publics alike. The discursive reproduction of the War and the contested sovereignty of the Falklands-Malvinas Islands began long ago, is likely to ensue for much time to come, and takes many

forms, from the cultural and social to the legal and economic. However, there is one particular configuration of political discourses that has re-surfaced in recent years that can reveal much about how ideas of national identity, sovereignty and security coalesce to animate certain forms of geopolitical practice over others. The discursive tropes that concern me herein are those that draw on the notion of the 'childish'. From claims that Argentina acts like a playground bully to the notion that the UK cannot accept basic facts that would be apparent to small children, ideas and beliefs about what comes to be understood as 'childish' permeate the politics of the Falkland-Malvinas.

What we come to recognise as childhood (the spatial and temporal limits of what precedes adulthood) and the child or children (the personhood prior to adulthood) is configured and reconfigured within different social spaces and temporalities; childhood and 'the child' is the outcome of social transformations and continuities not a natural state of being (Ariès 1962; Holmer Nadesan 2010). Indeed, our understandings of childhood are often not much at all about the lived experiences of the young, but about our collective beliefs about what children are, can be and should be. Equally, what therefore enables us to determine if something or someone is identifiable as 'childish' in nature or behaviour - who and what comes to be understood as resembling or reminiscent of a 'child' - is also historically, socially and culturally contingent.

One of the most significant functions of the notion of the modern child is its capacity to produce and reproduce modern 'man' as the agent of action, rationality, maturity and order (Jenks 2005). What has come to characterise the rational adult, able of

expressing their reasoned will, is their transcendence of the partiality that plagues childhood as a space of the “pre-social, potentially social, [and] in the process of becoming social” (Alanen 1988: 56). Since the nineteenth century this notion of the unfinished adult has grown especially with the proliferation of psychiatry. Childhood became a potential origin for abnormality in later life in this period, and adults became at risk from the condition of ‘arrested development’, a term denoting an adult, who had seemingly transcended childhood, acting out ‘like a child’ rather than an adult according to prevalent social norms of what constituted these subjectivities (Foucault 2003).

As such, the child has come to be “defined only by what the child is not but is subsequently going to be, and not by what the child presently is” (Alanen 1988: 56). It is in this context of becoming, of being incomplete, that the child becomes at once familiar yet strange to those who have come to be socially recognisable as ‘adult’. After all, adults were once children; indeed, the very condition of being reassured that one is an adult is that one is no longer a child. As social beings who are simultaneously ‘like us’ but ‘not like us’, children are not merely what adults are not however, but are more like what Simmel (1971) and Bauman (1991) call ‘strangers’. Strangers “are not perceived as individuals, but as strangers of a certain type” (Simmel 1971:148) and they require processes of assimilation not only to overcome their strangeness but to be considered as individuals capable of expressing reason. Whereas adults are drivers of agency, children are vehicles for structure.

The heroes of many a geopolitical tale are rational and ordered actors not children or sufferers of arrested development. They are individual agents in control of their

destinies and the destinies of others, but who have often had to confront muddled and irrational others in order to save the nation or the world from invasion, economic collapse, nuclear destruction, and so on. As various feminists have argued though (*inter alia* Tickner 1992; Petersen 1998; Steans 1998), claims to rationality ought to invite caution. They often entail “a reinforcement of the superiority of masculine characteristics such as rationality, resolve and strength” and frequently, with them, ‘strong’ military responses (Basham & Vaughan-Williams 2013: 516). Accusations of ‘childish’ behaviour can thus denigrate some practices whilst normalising others. As attempts to define the scope for political agency, they can play a significant role in determining what courses of action are most intelligible and come to be considered ‘sensible’.

In what follows, I focus primarily on British claims about the supposed childishness of Argentina in the ongoing ‘war’ over the Falklands-Malvinas. I examine two mutually reinforcing ways in which Argentina is defined as behaving in ways supposedly more befitting children than adults - that Argentina is a ‘sore loser’, unable to accept defeat and Britain’s legitimate claim to the Falklands, and that Argentina is a ‘bully’, acting out because it cannot get its way. I focus on these two particular tales in order to suggest that characterising Argentina as a somewhat puerile and fledgling nation allows Britain to define and consolidate itself on the world-stage as a rational adult nation worthy of being listened to. I attempt to demonstrate that this particular formation of identity, sovereignty and security enables military violence to become an integral part of the British national story, obscuring the aggressive role of the state in perpetuating violence over other practices. I conclude however, by considering how different tales are possible; tales that might disrupt the notion of the ‘rational’ adult by

questioning how the lived realities of children may serve as an important reminder of the *irrationality* of war.

### **Sore losers: 1833 and all that**

War is the *raison d'être* of the modern state. The sovereignty of states is “produced and defined by organised violence”; states proffer citizens security in exchange for their compliance, and it is war therefore, that produces and defines political community (Edkins 2003: 6). As a ubiquitous aspect of the national story, war engenders tales about its history, about specific wars themselves, and about the aftermath of war. The 74 days of military violence in 1982 that has come to be known in Britain as The Falklands War and in Argentina as La Guerra de las Malvinas, has been the subject of many stories. One especially salient telling for Argentina is of a breach of national sovereignty. The history of the War is of Las Islas Malvinas being forcibly seized in 1833 by a colonial power and of Argentina trying to regain its stolen territory ever since. The War in this story is a tale of reasserting a sovereign right to the Islands by sending troops there in 1982 to secure them, at the cost of an estimated 650 Argentine lives. Since the end of the War, a villainous Britain has consistently refused to engage in a legitimate dialogue with Argentina over the sovereignty of the Islands, which it continues to illegally colonise and militarise.

For Britain, an alternative but equally salient telling of the Falklands War is that the Islands have been British sovereign territory since 1833. The War of 1982 came about because the security of the Britons who legitimately resided there came under threat from Argentine aggression. This necessitated sending troops to the Islands at the cost 255 British servicemen and merchant seamen's lives, and the lives of 3



women Islanders<sup>2</sup>. In Britain's tale, the aftermath of the War has been characterised firstly by the suspension of diplomatic relations between Britain and Argentina until 1990, and since then, by relations with Argentina that have shifted from dialogical to hostile due to Argentina's refusal to accept the reality that the Falklands are British.

Whilst wars are the very condition of the state, they also have the capacity to unsettle the routinised temporality of social and political life (Edkins 2003). As something 'unexpected', war can constitute an affront to an everyday life imagined, performed and experienced as continuity. For traumas like wars to be socially intelligible therefore, re-imaginings are often necessary; and these frequently invoke "a linear narrative of national heroism" (Edkins 2003: xv). This is especially apparent in Britain's tale of the War. As Femenia (2000: 42) argues, when Argentine troops surrendered on 14 June 1982:

"both countries were left with the symbolic treasure over which they fought; Britain was left with a renewed sense of British world greatness and Argentina appropriated the role of victimized, heroic David resisting the prepotency of the superpowers"

Trauma's destabilising capacity has necessitated the rehabilitation of the War as an integral part of both nations' national stories and one particularly important effect of the reassertion of linearity is that the War appears to have "tragically confirmed for each national player... that war is a legitimate means to get to know who they are, and what they stand for" (Femenia 2000:42). In one tale of the Falklands-Malvinas, a victim

requires a stubborn aggressor. In another, a victor requires a loser. In both, however, the War is central to the intelligibility of those roles.

Recent anniversaries of the Falklands-Malvinas War suggest these stories of the War remain significant to the production of both nations as sovereign. On the thirtieth anniversary of the start of military hostilities, an anniversary with a number imbued with an almost 'magic' quality, Argentine President Cristina Fernández De Kirchner (in *BBC News Online* 2012) marked the occasion with a speech in which she reasserted Argentina's claim to the Islands but also its peaceful stance. She told the assembled crowd that with every day that goes by, British control of the Islands:

“looks more ridiculous, more absurd to the eyes of the world...It is an injustice that in the 21st Century there are still colonial enclaves... 16 colonial enclaves throughout the world - 10 of those belonging to the United Kingdom...We also demand that so they stop usurping our environment, our natural resources, our oil...[but] wars only bring backwardness and hatred”.

Similarly, Argentine Foreign Minister Héctor Timerman (2013) has insisted that Las Islas Malvinas are a “colonized territory” and a “militarized enclave of an extra-regional power”; that they rightfully belong to Argentina and that the ongoing dispute is a “matter of sovereignty and territorial integrity” for Argentina. British Prime Minister David Cameron's speech on the thirtieth anniversary of the War conjures a different telling of sovereignty, however. He stated that:

“[t]hirty years ago today the people of the Falkland Islands suffered an act of aggression that sought to rob them of their freedom and their way of life.

Today is a day for commemoration and reflection: a day to remember all those who lost their lives in the conflict - the members of our armed forces, as well as the Argentinian personnel who died” (Cameron in *BBC News Online* 2012).

Cameron (in *BBC News Online* 2012) went on to applaud the "heroism" of British troops and their role in “righting a profound wrong” and reminded his audience that:

"Britain remains staunchly committed to upholding the right of the Falkland Islanders, and of the Falkland Islanders alone, to determine their own future.

That was the fundamental principle that was at stake 30 years ago: and that is the principle which we solemnly reaffirm today."

These competing tales of sovereignty are the context for the UK’s repeated refusal to engage in discussions of sovereignty over the Islands with Argentina, on the grounds that it will only do so if and when the Islanders welcome these talks. Though giving due consideration to the wishes of the Islanders is important, Britain’s refusal to engage with Argentina also reinforces the notion that Argentina is a sore loser. As David Cameron (2011) put it to the House of Commons in 2011, “as long as the Falkland Islands want to be sovereign British territory, they should remain sovereign British territory—full stop, end of story”. Argentina appears as like a haranguing child, who despite being told to play fair, insists on getting its way, who needs to be told by the rational adult that enough is enough. Though adults are accused of being sore

losers, a sense of arrested development – the inability to fully transcend childhood - is often blamed for such behaviour. As Goodheart (2011: 527) argues:

“We have been taught from childhood not to be sore losers in the realization that it is only a game. A grandparent playing with his grandson learns how much easier it is to teach him the rules than to accept defeat...The rabid fans who rail against the losers on sports radio and threaten mayhem if the losing doesn't stop are the childish adults who never learned to distinguish between real life and a game”.

As the victor of the 1982 War, 'Britain' was performed, at that juncture, through “celebratory set pieces” in the tabloid press, replete with the usual invocations of ‘patriotism’ - such as in the *News of the World's* “Our boys caught Argies Napping” headline - and ‘jokes’ - such as in the *Sun's* notorious “Stick it up your Junta” headline (Latin America Bureau 1982: 119-120). Britain continues to be performed as the nation that accepted the reality of its role as victor and as the nation still able to hold victory parades and still able to speak of the heroism of its soldiers, it has emerged from the War as the storyteller with the capacity to point out it won and to point out the loser, and a sore one at that. Argentina is easily portrayed as unable to grasp that the ‘game’ is up, that the reality of defeat must be accepted if it wants to be taken seriously on the world stage.

### **Standing up to the Childish Bully (of Buenos Aires)**

For many British commentators, it is Argentina's aggressive ‘bullying’ stance that most characterises recent tales of the Falklands-Malvinas. The idea of Argentina as

a land of bullies frequently appears in online article reader comments and in the observations of political commentators. Falklands legislator Roger Edwards (in United Nations Department of Public Information 2012), who has accused Argentina of seeking to take away the rights of the Islanders, has asserted that, "all that we ask for is the right to determine our own future without the bullying tactics of a neighbouring country". British Foreign Secretary William Hague (in Wooding 2013) also recently stated that although there "was a time in the 1990s when there was a dialogue...the current Government of Argentina has turned away from that dialogue into a pattern of bullying and intimidatory behaviour towards the Falkland Islands"; he also asserted that he wanted Argentina "to know that this approach is completely counter-productive" (Hague in Wooding 2013).

Adults can be bullies of course and in some settings, behaviour that might constitute bullying is actually esteemed as a 'robust management style' and so forth. However, the bullying behaviour of adults is often viewed as a power relation, as a way of gaining certain aims and objectives. In contrast to the agentic and proactive individual adult however, the child bully, as a social being in the process of becoming and not yet an agentic social actor, is merely reacting to circumstances beyond its full comprehension. Thus Hague's insistence that bullying is "counter-productive" is more evocative of a teacher, or a parent, or any adult figure, telling a child that bullies never win, that one should not give in to intimidation rather than of a purposeful geopolitical strategy. The bully label thus casts Argentina as childish, as arrested in its development, and Britain as sensible and adult. In doing so, this supports the legitimacy of Britain's geopolitical claims about itself. To be rational is to

be decisive, to be worthy of speaking and being listened to; to be a childish bully is quite the opposite.

Such discourses also work to conceal Britain's own bullying or rather to rehabilitate it as an adult practice; as the right to militarily defend itself from a more destructive and hostile party, much like the robust manager. The idea that Britain is a nation that bravely stands up to intimidation is symptomatic of a longstanding facet of British national identity that transcends the Falklands-Malvinas. Shortly after the 1982 War, Anthony Barnett (2012) argued that one of its most significant effects was to allow Thatcher and Thatcher's Britain to cling to 'Churchillism'; to simultaneously express 'ourselves' as the plucky underdog, a small island nation threatened once again by Nazism - this time in the form of Argentine fascism - whilst still being a significant world player that, given Britain's modesty (even in light of its military might), meant the world simply needed British leadership. In an updated edition, Barnett (2012) claims that this 'Falklands Syndrome', a development of Churchillism, has continued to foster a feeling of entitlement to demonstrate British military superiority whenever possible, and that any defeat or setback simply justifies this further. For Barnett, this political discourse of national identity facilitated recent ill-fated military 'adventures' in Iraq and Afghanistan among others. Though the syndrome that Barnett identifies may have a longer heritage than the Falklands, 1982 and its anniversaries have represented particularly important opportunities for the re-articulation of Britain as 'Churchillian'. Contemporary British posturing over the Falklands-Malvinas may be in part about an Island in the South Atlantic and the people who live there, but it also facilitates the notion that Britain is a defiant, tolerant and plucky nation that deserves to have a role of influence on the world (Barnett 2012). Argentina, in contrast is a

young, inexperienced nation that needs to 'grow up'. That Britain, an old power, continues to be discursively reproduced as a voice of reason in the face of the childish bullying of a fledgling former colony, can only serve to reinforce this self-belief and projection.

Images of a bullying Argentina and a Britain respectful of the wishes of the Islanders were also prevalent following the outcome of a referendum in March 2013 in which just three Falkland Islanders voted against the Falkland Islands retaining their current political status as an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom. The remaining 99.7% of voters voted in favour, and as there was a voter turnout of over 90% it was popularly concluded that the outcome was undeniably pro-British. British Prime Minister David Cameron (in *BBC News Online* 2013) responded in a speech to the press the next day that the "Falkland Islands may be thousands of miles away but they are British through and through and that is how they want to stay...People should know we will always be there to defend them".

President Cristina Fernández De Kirchner disagreed though. Also invoking the idea of the 'childish', she questioned the very notion of an "English territory more than 12,000km away" and claimed that the question was "not even worthy of a kindergarten of three year olds"<sup>3</sup> (Fernández De Kirchner in Alexander 2013). Here the suggestion is that even children, beings of ongoing developmental cognition, would be able to comprehend the absurdity of Britain's claims to the Islands. The common response among British media sources however, was to deride De Kirchner's statement as a 'Twitter rant'. Once again her claims were marked out and denigrated as irrational, bullying and childish.

It is not only Argentina but specifically Argentina's leader who is frequently accused of being a bully. Former aide to Margaret Thatcher, Nile Gardiner, has taken to calling Argentine President Cristina Fernández De Kirchner 'the bully of Buenos Aires' (Gardiner 2013) and the much-respected British Falklands War veteran, Simon Weston (in Beech 2013) has called her "a sad lonely woman who's desperate to live out her dead husband's wishes". As a 'bully' and a woman "desperate" to fulfil her husband's legacy to regain Islas Las Malvinas for Argentina, Kirchner is at once gender nonconforming as a bully and gender conforming as the 'good wife'. In both cases, the representations of her, and of Argentina as an intimidating bully, are indicative of what Hutchings (2008: 33) calls a cognitive shortcut, something that resonates and resounds because it is part of the gendered and "entrenched logic[s]" that pervade the wider political imaginary. The notion that Argentina and Kirchner are bullies is a cognitive shortcut to irrationality and childishness on their part. As well as working to undermine Argentina's claims, however 'legitimate' or 'illegitimate' they may be, and its right even to speak and be heard, Britain emerges as that which Argentina is not, as the rational, adult speaker able to put forward claims built on reason. In standing up to the bully of Buenos Aires, Britain can only ever be the hero of this particular geopolitical tale.

This is also evident in other tales about the Islanders' right to self-determination, the right to remain 'British' should they chose to do so. Amid calls from the Argentine government in January 2012 for the UK to attend UN-led discussions over the future of the governing of the Islands, David Cameron (2012) told the British House of Commons that:



“The absolutely vital point is that we are clear that the future of the Falkland Islands is a matter for the people themselves. As long as they want to remain part of the United Kingdom and be British, they should be able to do so. That is absolutely key. I am determined to make sure that our defences and everything else are in order, which is why the National Security Council discussed the issue yesterday...I would argue that what the Argentinians have said recently is far more like colonialism, as these people want to remain British and the Argentinians want them to do something else”.

Though again asserting that military force is an option for the UK in supporting self-determination for the Islanders, Cameron’s mention of Argentina’s ‘colonialism’, and its assault on that self-determination, is suggestive of the very need to deal with a bullying Argentine aggressor, and militarily if necessary<sup>4</sup>. However, this discourse diverts attention from Britain’s colonial past; away from how Britain’s capacity to self-define as a plucky island nation, wishing to defend another of its own plucky islands, relies on the erasure of the violence of British Empire and its exploitation of the lands and bodies of others as an integral part of the nation, if not the national story. It also disguises the ways in which Britain’s belief in self-determination has always been contingent. For example, between 1968 and 1973, the British Government exiled all 1,500-2,000 inhabitants of Diego Garcia, a British overseas territory, to make way for a US military base (Vine 2009); and the 1982 war coincided with the ongoing deployment of British troops to Northern Ireland where self-determination was a right that was not extended to the people of that particular island when it was forcibly partitioned by Britain in the 1920s (Conroy 1987).

The notion of Argentine colonialism also obscures Britain's colonial practices in Latin America, including its initial desire to occupy, populate and secure the Falklands-Malvinas to access Latin American markets and thwart a Spanish colonial monopoly. It overlooks its paternalistic economic relationship with Argentina in the period after its decolonisation and well beyond (Latin America Bureau 1982) and how very little attention was paid by Britain, despite its self-identity as a key world player, to the inability of Argentines to determine their futures in 1982. Argentines were ineligible to vote and were governed by a military junta infamous for kidnapping, torturing and murdering its own citizens. Moreover, although Britain was well-aware of the human rights abuses in Argentina in 1970s and early 1980s, less than a year before Britain despatched its troops to the Falklands-Malvinas, the then Minister of Trade, Cecil Parkinson led a trade delegation to Argentina. Prior to doing so, he insisted that "trade with other countries should be determined by commercial considerations and not by the character of the governments concerned" (Parkinson in Latin America Bureau 1982: 84). Furthermore, British claims to respect the self-determination of the Islanders ought to invite critique. Though the military hostilities of 1982 were also characterised as a 'War of self-determination', where British troops fought for the rights of fellow British citizens to decide who would govern them, the Islands were governed at that time by a non-elected Governor appointed by London (Latin America Bureau 1982). In the process of wilfully forgetting its suppression or disregard for self-determination in some sites but not others, Britain has been able to contract and expand its borders at will; to re-assert its national identity, sovereign rights and its right to secure both in particular ways.

Another tale that Britain tells about the 1982 Argentine invasion of the Islands and its subsequent decision to send troops to the South Atlantic is that the invasion was an act of aggression that had to be tackled so it did not set the troubling international precedent of a breach of sovereignty going unpunished. In a post Afghanistan 2001 and Iraq 2003 world, the logics of this position are hardly difficult to critique but neither was this a compelling yarn in 1982. From support for Chile's campaigns of violence within its borders and without in Central America, to its refusal to provide sanctuary to Latin American political refugees without the blessing of the CIA, "Britain's less than illustrious record of standing up to international aggression...make its pretensions to an international policing role highly discreditable (Latin America Bureau 1982: 104).

The notion that Britain 'stands up' to intimidation is however, a productive one; it not only reinforces British claims about sovereignty but also about its right to militarily defend it and about its identity as a rational actor on the world stage. As a nation that can so readily demonstrate the rationality, resolve and strength that have come to be widely associated with war and war preparedness, it is difficult to mark Britain as irrational and childish. Conversely, it is easy to characterise Argentina in this way in a geopolitical context where the idea that war is inevitable is considered common sense, despite being based on a notion of 'human' nature founded in the experiences of a small number of (white) men (*inter alia* Tickner 1992; Steans 1998).

**War is not healthy for children and other living things<sup>5</sup>**

“[The] Tin-Pot Foreign General wanted to be important. He wanted to do something Historical so that his name would be printed in all the big History Books. So, one day, he got all his soldiers and all his guns and he put them into boats. Then he sailed them over the sea to the sad little island. There he stamped ashore and bagsied the sad little island for his own...Far away over the sea there lived an old woman with lots of money and guns...When this Old Iron Woman heard that the Tin-Pot Foreign General had bagsied the sad little island, she flew into a rage. It’s MINE! She screeched. “MINE! MINE! MINE! I bagsied it ages ago! I bagsied it FIRST! DID! DID! DID!” (Briggs 1984: 8-15).

As effective of social and political relations of power, discourses of the childish can also enable other tales, however. Renowned British children’s author Raymond Briggs’ particular tale of the 1982 Falklands-Malvinas War is of a childish squabble between the egotistical ‘Tin-Pot’ Argentine General Leopoldo Galtieri and Britain’s richer but equally stubborn ‘Old Iron Woman’, the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Though who ‘bagsied’ the Islands and when continues to ensure that tales of the past are dredged up to justify and articulate the present stand-off, and to envisage oppositional, divergent futures, Briggs’ tale pokes fun at the futility of such squabbling by casting both Britain and Argentina as resembling the behaviour of children. Though his depiction of Thatcher relies on sexualised caricature – for example, images of coins flowing out from Thatcher’s iron breasts to pay for her war – and elides other ways to be a child, Briggs’ tale could be regarded as what Agamben (2007; see also Basham & Vaughan-Williams 2013) calls a ‘profanation’. In toying with the ‘serious’ activity of war and its associated claims about legality,

territory and political economy, by belittling it as a childish squabble, Briggs' story returns the war to the everyday; to performances and practices that take place in mundane spaces. Whilst Briggs' book also highlights that the implications of such childish squabbles are far from innocent, comical or silly – several pages of the book detail the deaths of the men shot, torn apart and burned alive – it also unsettles more realist notions of war as an expression of rational, objective power, as self-evidently in the 'national interest' and as distinct from the social, the everyday (Tickner 1992).

Another way that childish can come to unsettle more prominent - or more loudly shouted - geopolitical tales is by looking to actual lived experiences of childhood. The agency and everyday lives of children are frequently erased from geopolitical tales but also, as I have tried to show, in the very expression of what we come to recognise as childhood and the childish. Though the multiple ways in which Argentine, British and Island children experienced the War, and how children continue to understand it, are beyond the scope of this particular article and warrant further research, there are still some stories that highlight the value of paying more attention to childhood and how it is militarised that can be considered here.

One such story is about some of the young men who fought. Despite the increased participation of women in the British armed forces, particularly over the past two decades or so, British service personnel have long been and are still frequently referred to as 'our boys' and the Falklands-Malvinas War was no exception. This collective moniker had and continues to have a number of political implications. As Helen Parr (2013) has argued, such mentions of 'our boys' during the Falklands-Malvinas War by politicians including the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and

by the British press, not only highlighted the fact that the Task Force was comprised exclusively of men – women were deployed but only in auxiliary roles, not combat - but also that these troops were not quite fully grown men. In being identified in this 'in-between' way but also as 'ours', British soldiers became sons of the nation. Their role as protectors of that nation may have motivated their deployment but as always someone's 'boy', they were also in need of the protection provided by that nation. Indeed, after the British sank the *General Belgrano*, bringing about the deaths of 323 Argentine sailors, Thatcher told the House of Commons that "our first duty is to protect our boys" (cited in Parr 2013: 2). Violence, in the form of killing or be killed, perhaps becomes a little more palatable when the life of one's sons is at stake.

Another function of the invocation of 'our boys' to describe a body of men of very different ages is to conceal the fact that under-18s, boys in the literal sense of the word, were put in actual danger. Much has been made of the notion that the Argentine invading forces were comprised not only of ill-equipped and poorly trained conscripts but young ones at that (see Stewart 1991) and it is the case that many were eighteen, nineteen and twenty year-olds with limited training and combat experience. Though some stories tell of an Argentina united behind a popular invasion in 1982, one source of dissent came from members of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, the group of mothers and other relatives who took to the streets to protect the 'disappearances' of children during the years of Argentina's military rule from 1976-1983. As one mother said:

"We were opposed to the Malvinas [War] because for us they were doing the same thing as they did to our children. They kidnapped those young soldiers

as well, because they were sent there by force...We were against it because the military were using it to raise their prestige, to try to glorify themselves...They wanted to keep their hands soaked in the blood of our young people” (Carmen de Guede in Fisher 1989: 115).

Less has been made of the British deployment of seventeen year-olds into combat however, and that the youngest British soldier killed in Falklands-Malvinas War, Paratrooper Ian Scrivens, was just seventeen when he died. He was killed in the same violent incident as fellow Paratroopers Jason Burt, who was also seventeen years old, and Neil Grose, who turned 18 on the day that all three boys were killed. Britain remains the only state of the EU, Council of Europe and United Nations Security Council Permanent Members that still recruits from age 16, and although under-18s in the British armed forces are prohibited from participation in armed conflict by official government policy, this policy can be overruled if ‘military need’ deems the deployment of minors necessary, or where it is considered impracticable to withdraw them before deployment (Child Soldiers International & ForcesWatch 2013).

## **Conclusion**

Anniversaries marking ‘events’ associated with the 1982 Falklands-Malvinas War in social time have facilitated the telling of a variety of geopolitical tales about sovereignty, national identity and security. Such stories have resurfaced ‘periodically’ with calendric markers and are likely to continue to resurface given that the war over the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands/Las Islas Malvinas, and its place in the national stories of Britain and Argentina, is far from settled. As I have attempted to

demonstrate, one particularly salient story is of a sensible Britain standing up to an Argentine sore loser and bully; of an adult, rational and ordered Britain that finds meaning in contradistinction to the muddled and frenzied activities of the childish Argentine other. Such metaphors and figures of speech invoking the 'childish' are as Shapiro (1985: 195) argues, never "mere adornments added to the cognitive meaning of expressions. They impose and order our reality insofar as they create meaning and value"<sup>6</sup>. Indeed, as I have tried to demonstrate, where childhood surfaces as metaphor in the ongoing war for the Falklands-Malvinas, it constitutes an attempt to determine the parameters for political action.

The functioning of a geopolitical order of rational actors also relies on routinised and assumed notions of Newtonian temporality. As a trauma, something that has the capacity to disrupt the continuity of everyday life, war has to be remade, retold as an integral, normal part of the national story. As Lundborg (2012) argues, to speak of war as an 'event' relies greatly on such suppositions that war has a clear before and after, a singularity and coherence. These assumptions are not only reliant upon the materialisation of a speaker who decides the boundaries of the 'event' however, but also on the erasure of multiple experiences of war as lived, ongoing and resurgent, rather than contained. For the soldier with PTSD re-living each battle as a visceral experience for example, war is never a simple matter of before and after but is a constant, a continuum (Sylvester 2010).

When considered this way, the analysis of any 'war' necessarily entails paying greater attention to everyday social practices and processes that foster war preparedness and the prioritisation of military force in societies as well as notions of



'war' itself (Cockburn 2012). Attempts to speak of the 74 days of military violence between Argentina and Britain in 1982 as an event can also be troubled by exploring traces of the geopolitical in the everyday. Even for Britain as the 'victor', something highly suggestive of a clear end-point to the war, the suicides and post-traumatic stress of veterans "tell a different tale" (Edkins 2003: 1). Moreover, though maps, textbooks, memorials, and so on enable the reproduction of the Falkland Islands/Las Islas Malvinas in everyday settings in Argentina, Britain and on the Islands themselves, the meaning and significance of these everyday artefacts cannot be assumed to be universally shared (Benwell & Dodds 2011). As others have also shown, expressions of 'everyday nationalism' suggestive of a degree of unity with national storytelling can also be temporally contingent (Benwell & Dodds 2011; see also Jones and Merriman 2009). They often rely on the 'heating up' of longstanding tensions to jog the memories of people consumed with more pressing daily matters (Benwell and Dodds 2011). Moreover, and importantly, though childhood and the childish as social discourses often elide the actual experiences of children and deny them a bona fide subjectivity, alternative tales depicting the childish behaviour of supposed adults in facilitating childhoods marred by violence tell a different story.

War is not an inevitability therefore; neither is it a contained event. It is not in any way healthy for children and other living things. The reincorporation of war into a national story characterised by periods of war and peace conceals the role of that very state in the production of war and the ruptures it creates. However, by paying closer attention to the stories the state tells, and by looking to others, the state's reliance on a geopolitical story of distinct periods of war and peace for claiming authority via its capacity to provide continued security for its citizens becomes more

visibly contingent (Edkins 2003). Claims about the childish may have the potential to facilitate militarism; the telling of geopolitical tales of rational heroism in the face of sore losers and bullies may materialise war and its violence but as geopolitical tales, other stories are always possible.

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<sup>2</sup> These 3 civilian women were mistakenly killed by British troops and weapons.

<sup>3</sup> This is a rough translation. The original tweet reads: "Territorio inglés a más de 12 mil kms de distancia? La pregunta no aguanta ni jardín de infantes de 3 años".

<sup>4</sup> In February 2012 the Royal Navy dispatched HMS Dauntless, a Type 45 destroyer and one of its most advanced warships to the South Atlantic and the Royal Air Force deployed Prince William, heir to the British throne, to the Islands to carry out search and rescue duties. This was widely reported as

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having been interpreted by Kirchner's administration as an act of aggression. Cameron is also reportedly willing to send fast jets and troops to the Islands (Mason 2013).

<sup>5</sup> This anti-war slogan was especially popularised by Lorraine Schneider's 1966 poster which displayed the slogan and a flower. It emerged in reaction to the Vietnam War.

<sup>6</sup> See also Reeves, 2013 on the political significance of metaphor.