



## SUMMARY

- The idea of a »monopoly of force« can be more adequately described as a compulsory security formation. However, it is by no means the only way in which security can be provided.
- From a perspective of political economy, security practices can be distinguished in terms of either the compulsory or commercial provision of security services. This distinction cuts right through established epistemologies of political science, with their emphases on state/non-state or public/private dichotomies. It shifts the main focus from actor-type to the types of relations and exchanges we encounter in security networks.
- As a brief empirical overview demonstrates, different types of agents assume different positions in both compulsory and commercial formations.
- The »state,« it follows, does not matter from this perspective; it is but one actor among many, which may provide security and accumulate capital in different ways.

## The Political Economy of Security Practice

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Security can be understood as a good or, in the terminology of Karl Marx, a use-value. This is not to automatically inject it with an ontological value, positing security as an objective condition of existence that answers to some »real« human need. It is simply to argue that many people evoke the term in order to articulate a thing they deem necessary or at least desirable. Such use-values may show themselves in the guise of some material artifact, such as a padlock, a gun, or a CCTV camera. They could also consist in certain practices or services, be it fighting a war against a dangerous enemy or guarding a building to keep away burglars. A general definition might extend to all those artifacts and activities that identify perceived threats and endangered objects and/or set out to engage them in one way or another. Importantly, security does not appear out of nowhere. It needs to be »done,« produced and enacted, thus always requiring some sort of human labor. Padlocks do not grow on trees. Every security use-value is of value only inasmuch as labor has been invested into its production.

In some cases, use-values will be immediately consumed and enjoyed by the very persons or institutions that produced them in the first place. For example, I might decide to build a wall in order to secure my belongings from potential burglars. Both my labor (building the wall) and its use-value (the wall itself) remain exclusively in my possession. Security comes in the form of self-governance. In other cases, I could decide to transfer my labor and/or the use-values it produces to another. It is at this moment that security practice goes nodal (and, one might argue, political). Security can thus be described in terms of the relations between distinct positions. These transactions, in turn, adhere to at least two basic set of rules. On the one hand, security use-values (and/or labor) might be given away »for free« as a gift. Cultural anthropologists have described at great length how gifting practices set into motion a dynamic of symbolic exchange and thereby establish lasting social relations between people. Anything but an arbitrary gesture, the gift – including the gift of security – is an inalienable good that demands reciprocal action, thus binding the receiver to the giver.

On the other hand, security can be exchanged directly for not purely symbolic but economic capital, usually money. It becomes a commodity, a thing that is offered and sold on a market. Sometimes only the labor (to produce security use-values) will be commodified,

as in the case of a police officer who receives pay in return for selling his labor to the state. At other times, commodification will also extend to the use-value of security itself, as with a private security company working for paying customers. Only this latter case can be regarded as an expression of *commercial* security proper. Moreover, if labor and use-value are commodified simultaneously, security becomes locked into a capitalist mode of production and exchange. The money that the laborer receives in return for his or her services is less, in equivalent, than that received for the use-value sold to another. Commercial security creates surplus-value and can be specified more clearly as corporate security.

A brief reflection on the political economy of security allows us to distinguish multiple types of interaction between providers and receivers of security-producing labor and use-values. The remainder of this paper argues that these relations can be understood more systematically if a basic distinction is drawn between *compulsory* and *commercial* security.

## COMPULSORY SECURITY

Compulsory security practices secure their objects by force. They may be directed at institutions, production sites, or territorial borders; more often than not, compulsory security targets people. The basic relation between providers and receivers is always of a coercive nature. Receivers do not enter the relation voluntarily; they become secured, whether they want to or not. Hence, the providers also determine the concepts and strategic objectives of security practice.

On their own, such coercive alignments do not directly accumulate capital. On the contrary: since security use-values are provided »for free«, they may well be characterized as public or collective goods. Nevertheless, compulsory security often relies on partial commodification. The production of use-values needed for the »gift« of security could entail a need to commodify security-producing labor, the emergence of the nation-state in early modern Europe being a prime example. The establishment and maintenance of standing armies (and, later, police forces) required the payment of regular wages to soldiers and police (Gill 2003, 157).<sup>1</sup> Marx himself noted in *Grundrisse* that »[o]ne of the forms in which this kind of pay [*Besoldung*] first appears in the old communities is where an army is maintained«. Just as with the worker in the

factory, the »pay [*Sold*] of the common soldier is also reduced to a minimum – determined by the production costs necessary to procure him« (1993, 468, original emphasis). The state owns the means of production to create the use-value of security (weapons etc.) in the same manner that the private entrepreneur, the capitalist, owns the means of production (machines etc.) to create any other use-value. Both commodify and exploit labor.

Crucially, however, the commodification of security-producing labor does not coalesce in the commodification of security itself. A defining feature of compulsory security practices is that they decommodify the distribution of security use-values. This is not to suggest that they shy away from accumulating economic capital. Indeed, they are often guided by a desire for material gain. Depending on how such resources are acquired, either as rents or as profit, two sub-types of compulsory security practice can be distinguished:

## EXTORTION OF RENTS

The first sub-type is premised upon the extortion of rents. In the understanding of Marx, the term »rent« describes a specific type of surplus-value, which a »rentier« accrues by virtue of owning the land whereupon that value is produced (Marx 2007, 743). The rentier is a kind of »parasite feeding of the productive activity of others« (Yates 1996, 17). Importantly, rent-seeking activities need to be distinguished from the capitalist exploitation of labor, for they rely on the non-commercial extraction of surplus-value by extra-economic extortion (Elster 1994: 167–68).<sup>2</sup> Security practices become implemented in order to enable the effective extortion of rents. Again, they can be divided in accordance to whether they target the productive activities of a territorially bound populace or de-territorialized exchange processes.

## DETERRITORIAL EXTORTION

»Rentier economies« and »rentier states« have become popular designations in political science. An idea originally coined in 1970 by Hussein Mahdavy with reference to Iran, a »rentier state« would be »any state that derives a substantial part of its revenue« not only »under the form of rent,« but – crucially – »from

1 The regular and formalized payment of wages to soldiers was not always the norm in the history of warfare. Charles Tilly noted that »soldiers and sailors were often expected to provide for themselves by preying on the civilian population: commandeering, raping, looting, taking prizes« (1985, 173).

2 For Elster, »[t]here are important differences between extraction of surplus labour through extra-economic coercion and exploitation in the market« (1994, 168). The former occurs in those cases where the laborer remains the owner of the means of production; hence he can only be exploited by means of direct coercion (ibid., 169; also Marx 1999, 458).

foreign sources« (Beblawi and Luciani 1987, 11). For example, quite a few states in sub-Saharan Africa accumulate the lion's share of their »fiscal revenues from customs duties on imports and exports [of] the mostly extractive companies operating in [their] territories« (Oliveira 2007, 41). The pertinent point here is that only very small parts of the population will probably be involved in the productive (surplus-generating) activities from which the state extorts its revenues (see Beblawi and Luciani 1987, 11; Luciani 1990, 69; Yates 1996, 14).

This has two basic effects. First, reliance on rents from foreign or international sources is likely to correspond with low levels of overall (domestic) taxation (Migdal 1988, 282; Yates 1996, 15; Engel and Olsen 2005, 45–48; Bräutigam 2008, 19; Schwarz 2008, 604). Second, security practices do not primarily seek to enhance the productive capacities of a territorial populace. They are rather bent upon securing the extraction of rents from transnational, comparatively deterritorialized and often highly dynamic resource flows. At times, they may protect small locales of strategic importance, yet (and depending on the kind of rent in question) these could shift from one place to another, never fixed and static, let alone incorporating or enclosing greater (political) territories (Hardt and Negri 2000, 46, 163).

This is not to say that all rentier states are weak or that they always refrain from redistributing the capital they extort. Although the population is less of a resource to be tapped, it remains a potentially dangerous competitor, which needs to be kept quiet. Most rentier states respond to this problem with a 'carrot-and-stick' approach. Some lean more to the carrot, others rely almost exclusively on the stick. The former were characterized by Giacomo Luciani as »allocation states« (1990, 71). They may initiate large-scale welfare projects, where externally generated surplus is invested in promoting the wealth and well-being of a broad population base – as is particularly the case in the Arab Gulf region (*ibid.*, 82; also Schwarz 2008, 609). In these cases, »state-provided welfare« is mainly aimed at the »cooptation of strategic social groups« and thus »linked to a state-building agenda of creating societal peace and political acquiescence« (Schwarz 2008, 609; also Ross 2001).

Not every rentier state is able and/or willing to allocate its resources in such a broad manner. Instead of targeting the entire populace, ruling elites in »neo-patrimonial« systems forge complex patronage-networks wherein economic capital becomes transacted for the loyalty of a carefully selected client base (Lewis 1994, 438; Engel and Erdmann 2006, 27–28). At the most

extreme, it is possible to imagine rentier states that refrain from distributing resources and services to any wider social group beyond a close-knit circle of immediate beneficiaries. These can be described as »predatory« or »kleptocratic« states (Evans 1989, 562; 1992) and are usually the most repressive and unstable arrangements.

## TERRITORIAL EXTORTION

Territorial extortion corresponds to what Branovic and Chojnacki call a »protection and taxation system« (2007, 196). Coercion proceeds along two lines here: people are forced to pay up, either by force or threat of force; and they are simultaneously compelled to submit to a particular security regime that seeks to ensure high levels of productivity (to avoid overplundering) and keep competing extortionists at bay. The prime example is, of course, the ideal-typical European welfare state with its relatively high degree of redistribution.

However, it would be a mistake to confine analyses of such dynamics to the doings of (national) state organs alone. Especially in the Global South one finds widespread evidence for alternate forms of territorial extortion or taxation that are directly linked to the compulsory provision of decommodified security. They usually operate at the sub-state level. Taxation, in other words, goes local. Examples include municipal security arrangements in major cities such as Lima in Peru and Cape Town in South Africa. Some city districts levy a special tax on residents and enterprises, investing the resources collected in implementing security measures designed to improve the overall business climate and attract foreign investment. The more localized such a system is, the more exclusionary it often becomes. Not only do the actual security practices commonly result in the removal of, for instance, vagrants, beggars and street children. Those who cannot afford to pay the local tax are also forced to move to another (poorer) area of the city. Capital does not become redistributed across wider lines of economic stratification (as in the welfare state); its circulation – and investment in security use-values – remains firmly confined to serving the material interests of a relatively small and wealthy elite.

Territorial extortion is, of course, also a hallmark feature of the mafia-style protection racket (Hess 1998, 194; also Varese 2001; Cooley 2006). To be sure, the extortion practiced by such groups sometimes assumes the form of mere plunder (Skaperdas 2001, 174). As Vadim Volkov points out, it »does not occur on a regular basis or within the context of a broader

organization in whose name the money is collected, and it does not offer regular or imaginary services in return» (2002, 33). In the worst case, victims find themselves locked in a »protection screw,« where a diverse market of violent entrepreneurs or »roving bandits« creates the very demand for protection (by plundering) that it simultaneously claims to supply (by extorting protection money), thus »squeezing the target from two sides« (Lambach et al. 2010, 12; also Mehlum et al. 2002).

However, not all non-state groups that establish and operate coercive systems of extortion engage in mere plundering. With regard to the Russian *mafia*, Volkov goes on to argue that although »[f]ew racketeers have an initial intention to protect someone« and »[e]ach of them taken in isolation would prefer easy« plunder, in practice they are often »compelled to protect« their clients, usually against plundering by other, competing racketeers (2002, 34–35). For, as it were, »[e]ach wielder of force can be the protector of those who are his clients and a threat [...] to those who are not« (35). Just as one of the primary security functions of the state is to protect its citizens against the threat posed by other states (invading territory and extracting resources from the populace), non-state racketeers, too, seek to secure their turf against competitors.

At the same time, racketeers may also want to provide internal security. In his reflection on the objectives of what he refers to as »stationary bandits,« Mancur Olson contends that »[t]he stationary bandit, because of his monopoly on crime and taxation, has an encompassing interest in his domain that makes him limit his predations because he bears a substantial share of the social losses resulting from these predations.« Indeed, it may even give »him an incentive to provide public goods that benefit his domain and those from whom his tax theft is taken« (2000, 9; cited in Mair 2005, 49).

## MAKING A PROFIT

A second type of compulsory security practice seeks to support not so much the extortion as the exploitation of economic capital. Surplus comes not in the form of rent, but of profit, gained through the direct exploitation of commodified labor. Any such endeavor may nevertheless require the decommodification of security use-values in order to protect the necessary production and exchange relations. In fact, the corresponding security practices could closely resemble those applied for the purpose of (territorial) extortion. For example, the owner of a factory could install various security measures to keep the workers healthy and productive (internal security), whilst also protecting his premises

and production facilities from intrusion (external security). If the owner employs security guards to this end, he or she consumes and commodifies security-producing labor, yet profits only indirectly from this appropriation (Resnick and Wolff 2001, 915–16). Just as states commonly pay soldiers and police officers to provide security services as a public good to their populace (and gain certain advantages from so doing), the factory-owner, too, distributes security use-values in accordance with a non-productive logic, which does not seek to generate surplus-value from selling it (as commodity) to a third-party customer.

Again, various qualifications must be made. First of all, profit-seeking actors encompass not only private businesses and criminal gangs, but also public bodies. For example, Middle Eastern oilfields, production facilities, and oil companies are often firmly in the hands of state institutions (Yates 1996, 20; Schwarz 2008, 606). Secondly, the accumulation of profits may – or may not – depend on a large and territorially-based workforce. Especially this latter factor is likely to influence the extent to which redistributive dynamics establish compulsory security relations between distinct positions of security providers and receivers. Many large corporations engage in extensive security practices, which aim to promote the health, well-being, and, above all, productivity of their workers.

A case in point is the large plantations in parts of West Africa, which usually accommodate a massive workforce spread over an extensive territorial space. Located not far from Liberia's capital Monrovia, Firestone is the world's largest rubber plantation, now belonging to the multinational Bridgestone Corporation. In Liberia alone, it employs some 100,000 people, all of whom live and work within the bounds of the plantation. Firestone operates its own schools, its own healthcare facilities, and even its own private police force – the Plantation Protection Department (PPD), consisting of up to six hundred officers (compared to only four officers of the Liberian National Police on the plantation; UNMIL 2006, 58–59).<sup>3</sup> According to a 2006 report by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), Firestone's internal security and justice system – which includes penal measures such as coercive detention – operates largely beyond the effective control of the Liberian state (UNMIL 2006, 57–59).<sup>4</sup> Liberians frequently characterize the plantation as a »state within a state.«<sup>5</sup> Whether its level of service delivery to workers can be likened to that expected of a welfare

<sup>3</sup> Observations and informal interviews during a visit to the Firestone plantation on February 4, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Confirmed in an interview with a local security expert in Monrovia, February 4, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Interviews with local NGOs and UNMIL personnel, Monrovia, February 1 and 2, 2011.

state can certainly be contested.<sup>6</sup> In any case, Firestone does seem to embody a fairly independent compulsory security formation, which – unlike the classic state – is not premised on the extortion of rents or taxes, but on profits gained from the exploitation of labor and commercial exchange. Nevertheless, its actual biopolitical techniques of governing and securing lives may turn out to be very similar indeed.

## COMMERCIAL SECURITY

Compulsory security is only part of the picture suggested by a comprehensive political economy of security. It is distinct from commercial security practices that commodify security use-values. Their core feature consists of a transaction between provider and receiver, which turns security into a commodity. Security acquires an exchange-value and is delivered on a market in direct return for material capital (usually money). The defining alignment of commercial security is non-coercive. Receivers enter voluntarily into the exchange. They select – as customers – the conceptual and strategic orientation of the security use-value that is best suited to their needs. What is more, the production of security appears as both the means and the end of capital accumulation. Security is not produced for consumption by the producer, nor is it intended to be given away as a gift. Profit is made from selling security itself. Transactions proceed in an immediate (rather than delayed) manner, with security provided as an alienable good or service to whoever chooses to consume it. Alignments between providers and receivers remain firmly tied to the impersonal logic of economic rationality alone. At least hypothetically, they will hardly be supplemented by forms of symbolic exchange, such as some imagined social contract.

Depending on whether they commodify labor or not, two sub-types of commercial security can be differentiated. This distinction relates to the degree of separation between the positions of laborers and providers. On the one hand, security is a product of labor – a practice – and as such always attached to an active human being or a group of human beings who »do« security in one way or another. On the other hand, commercial security providers are profit-oriented agents who sell security-related goods and services in direct exchange for economic capital. To the extent that an individual security worker owns the means of production relevant to his or her trade (in the form of material artifacts, such as weapons, a vehicle, surveillance and communication equipment, and/or cultural capital such as skills and knowledge), he or she can directly participate, at once laborer and provider,

in commercial market exchanges. The worker sells the exploits of his or her own labor power to a paying customer, thereby earning a living. Such is the case, for example, with freelance mercenaries, unattached »soldiers of fortune« or *condottiere*, offering their individual (security) services to the highest bidder.

As Marx frequently stresses, however, laborers are not necessarily the actual providers of the commodities that they create by virtue of their labor power. Commercial security may also adhere to a capitalist mode of production, premised upon the exploitation of labor to maximize surplus value. Commodification occurs on two levels here, as both the labor of the individual security worker and the use-value of the security service he or she produces become commodified. Workers (individuals »doing« security) and providers (capitalist organizations that own the means of production for »doing« security) appear as two separate nodal positions, with the former selling their labor and receiving less in exchange than what the provider receives in return for selling the use-value of security. A security guard may temporarily offer his labor to a company, yet it is the company, not the guard, that provides the use-value of this labor to a paying customer in order to generate surplus value. Commercial security thus becomes structured as a corporate (or capitalist) production process.

This dynamic underlies what Peter W. Singer, in the first comprehensive study of the so-called »privatized military industry,« referred to as the »corporatization« of military-related security practices: The successive trajectory from comparatively small and loosely organized bands of individual mercenaries, which dominated much of the debate in political science between the 1960s and 1980s (Mockler 1969; Burchett and Roebuck 1977; Mallin 1979; Ticker 1987; Gaiani 1990), to the large, corporate structures of contemporary »private military firms,« which often employ thousands of workers as military contractors (Singer 2003, 42–45). The same applies to the wider security industry around the world. For example, there is a visible trend among humanitarian relief and development organizations to switch from individual in-house guards to corporate security companies. Security workers are hardly ever also the providers of the services they deliver.

Although Singer and, for that matter, most scholarly research on commercial security practices (see Avant 2005; Abrahamsen and Williams 2011) limit their consideration of security providers to private business enterprises, the analytical lens suggested here potentially takes a far larger variety of actors into account. One central argument of this paper is that neither compulsory nor commercial security

<sup>6</sup> For example, the 2006 UNMIL report criticizes poor housing (40) and inadequate educational facilities (44) at the Firestone plantation.

formations immediately correlate with any particular type of actor. State bodies do not have to distribute the security-related use-values they generate through the commodification of labor in a non-commercial and compulsory manner. Just like any private security company, they might decide to sell security as a commodity. Commercial security does not equal non-state or private security. It is not the political status of the provider that makes security commercial, but its interpolation within a particular political economy of consumption and production.

There are many recent studies in political science and sociology on commercial security services by private business enterprises. The following discussion will therefore restrict itself to pinpointing two dynamics of commercial security provision that have been comparatively underresearched, yet operate under the same logic of exchange: commercial security by states and commercial security by non-state and non-corporate groups.

### COMMERCIAL SECURITY BY STATES

States can be direct agents of commercial security. The security organs of the state, without pretending to be anything else, sell security use-values as commodities on commercial markets in order to make profit (Bayley and Shearing 2001, 14; Ayling and Shearing 2008, 28; Scheye 2009, 14). They thereby become very much akin to security companies themselves, quite possibly competing over market share with privately owned firms. Such practices are far more widespread than is commonly assumed. Throughout the world, the economic activities of government are not restricted to the collection of rents and the redistribution of wealth. More often than not, state actors also seek direct economic gain, and the state security sector is no exception. Military forces, particularly in the so-called developing world, frequently supplement their public funding by establishing business ventures (Brömmelhörster and Paes 2003, 2–3). While they trade in a wide variety of goods, ranging from hotel accommodation to transportation services and drug trafficking (Schulte-Bockholt 2006, 33–34), the commodification of security services is a particularly obvious enterprise for both military and police forces (Heiduk 2005, 6–7, 18–19).

Julie Ayling and Clifford Shearing demonstrate that the public police routinely engage in the commercial provision of security services (2008). Whereas commercial policing by state bodies is illegal in some countries, such as New Zealand and the Netherlands, in others, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, it is common practice. In parts of Australia individual police departments decide what types of

services require payment by the user (*ibid.*, 30). Typical »user pays« services include traffic control for private business purposes (for example film shoots or road closures at construction sites), criminal history and probity checks, forensic services, and incident and accident reports provided to insurers. Sometimes, it is even possible to rent a police officer as a guard for a specific time (31–32). »In Russia, serving law-enforcement officers are openly available for hire« (Galeotti 2004, 276). Many local police forces run a distinct agency, known as the Extra-Departmental Guard or VO (*Vnevedomstvennaya okhrana*), dedicated to providing commercial security services to paying customers. Such arrangements seem to be quite common across urban Russia. In St. Petersburg, a study discovered »that of all mobile police patrols [...] during business hours, half of them were actually earmarked for the VO« (276; see also Varese 2001, 60–61).

Similarly exchanges occur all over the world, especially in Latin America. In Ecuador the police routinely »demand payment from individuals, organizations, and neighborhoods for regular policing services, while, in Mexico's Federal District, 70 percent of the service's manpower is allegedly assigned to provide security to private interests« (Scheye 2009, 17). In Bolivia, the state police »officially provides private security through the National Police's Battalion of Private Physical Security (Battalion de Seguridad Fisica Privada),« which consists of up to seven thousand officers (Ungar 2007, 28). Field research in Peru found that the Yanacocha gold mine, owned in part by the US Newmont Mining Corporation, is protected by a contingent of the Dirección de Operaciones Especiales (DINOES), a specialized police unit mainly employed in counter-terrorist operations and quelling social protests.<sup>7</sup> Newmont reportedly holds a contract with DINOES that is renewed on a monthly basis. Although its precise conditions remain confidential, it probably provides for regular payments from the mining company to the Peruvian police.<sup>8</sup>

State-rendered commercial security may be especially prevalent in areas of political instability and violent conflict, where business enterprises are prepared to devote considerable economic resources to purchasing security services. For example, Chinese companies across Indonesia regularly pay large sums to local military commanders in return for protection for their business interests, production sites, and employees;

7 Interviews with a local security expert, Lima, Peru, May 24, 2011, and a member of the Defensoria del Pueblo, Cajamarca, Peru, May 27, 2011.

8 Interviews with a senior police officer, Lima, Peru, June 2, 2011; Marco Arana Zegarra from Grufides, Cajamarca, Peru, May 27, 2011; a member of the Defensoria del Pueblo, Cajamarca, Peru, May 27, 2011; and a local security expert, Lima, Peru, May 24, 2011.

in the notoriously unstable province of Aceh alone, the provision of security services reportedly earns the Indonesian armed forces around \$400 million per year (Heiduk 2005, 18).

In Nigeria, »[v]irtually all levels of public force, including the military, have been integrated into the day-to-day security arrangements of the oil industry to a degree where it is often difficult to determine where public policing ends and private security begins« (Abrahamsen and Williams 2005, 13). Shell Nigeria has been reported to utilize up to 2,500 members of the Nigerian police and armed forces to protect production facilities and oil pipelines across the Niger Delta. About half of the public servants working for Shell are unarmed police officers. Although they formally belong to the Nigerian Police Force, their salaries are paid by the oil company, which also exercises direct control and supervision over their activities (ibid., 13). Such arrangements are not always commercial security exchanges. The economic transaction between Shell and the Nigerian police does not exceed payment of wages. Strictly speaking, the company buys (and commodifies) security-producing labor rather than ready-made use-values. The actual distribution of the services rendered is not determined by a commercial calculus (Shell does not sell the security use-values it produces to others for profit) but by the security interests of the oil company itself, which owns the means of production.

Other security-related transactions between Shell and the public security sector in Nigeria are of a commercial nature, however. This applies to the other security officials allocated to the oil company, which are armed soldiers belonging either to the paramilitary Mobile Police (MoPol) or to the Nigerian Army or Navy. Their services are not acquired through appropriating labor power, but by paying an »administrative fee« to military commanders (Abrahamsen and Williams 2005, 13). The soldiers themselves, unlike the unarmed police, remain under the authority and command of their own officers (Scheye 2009, 17). Instead of producing security itself (through appropriating labor power), Shell becomes a customer of the Nigerian military, which – in this case – is a distinct commercial provider.

Similar alignments between extraction companies (as customers) and national armed forces (as providers of commercial security) can also be found in Western Papua. Here, foreign gold-mining corporations have allegedly been buying protection from the Indonesian armed forces since the 1970s (Heiduk 2005, 19). According to a report by the NGO Global Witness, the US mining company Freeport McMoRan disclosed in 2003 that it had paid \$4.7 million in 2001 and \$5.6 million in 2002 for »support costs for government-provided security« (Global Witness 2005, 4). Like the

Nigerian military, the Indonesian armed forces act like any private security company, selling security use-values in direct exchange for economic capital.<sup>9</sup>

## COMMERCIAL SECURITY BY NON-STATE GROUPS

Organized groups of individuals that are neither formally registered business enterprises nor organs of the state apparatus constitute another type of commercial security provider. There is a proliferating body of literature on non-state security agents other than commercial companies (Mair 2002; Button 2003; Boege 2004, 2007; Bryden and Caparini 2006; Bakonyi et al. 2006; Ebo 2007; Pratten and Sen 2008; Baker 2008, 2010). These range from criminal organizations and youth gangs to militias and vigilante groups. Like state bodies, they could begin to mimic the private security industry and provide security in a commercial manner.

One well-known example of non-corporate and non-state security provider is the so-called Bakassi Boys. Established in late 1997 in Abia State, Nigeria, they were an »amorphous« vigilante group, composed of »obscure young men from different local communities,« and originally paid by the shoemakers' association to »defend themselves against the onslaught of armed hoodlums« (Omeje 2005, 76). Until the group was disbanded in 2002, it was highly successful in securing the activities of a large number of small-scale businesses in remote areas of the country against crime and, importantly, in direct return for monetary payments made by various trade associations to their leaders (Baker 2002; Harnischfeger 2003; Smith 2004).

Similar arrangements exist in other places. A study on vigilante organizations in Liberia suggests that at least some of them commodify security use-values. The Mandingo Group, which operates in the remote province of Voinjama, is said to collect fees from families (20 Liberian dollars) and shops (50 Liberian dollars) in return for its services (Kantor and Persson 2010, 25). It is not entirely clear whether these exchanges are voluntary or whether the groups should actually be characterized as a kind of protection racket within a compulsory security formation. Nevertheless, it does seem that – like the Bakassi Boys – some vigilantes in Liberia rely on voluntary market exchanges to finance

9 Unlike in Nigeria, the involvement of Indonesian state bodies in commercial security practices remains somewhat contentious and controversial. It has not been formalized within a legal framework, and although apparently generally tolerated sometimes also attracts considerable criticism. In 2002, a military commander had to call back thirty-three soldiers when it became publicly known that they were being paid by the Indonesian Bank Restructuring Agency to protect its financial assets (Jakarta Post 2002).

their activities, as evidenced by the Bazzi Quarter Group, which »claimed to have stopped patrolling because the community no longer wanted to or could support them financially« (ibid., 27).

In northern South Africa rural businesses rely for security on a large organization by the name of Mapogo a Matamaga (Baker 2008, 92). Depending »on their status or the size of their organization,« businesses seeking protection pay an annual fee between 100 and 10,000 rand to become a member of the fifty-thousand-member Mapogo network (Ditlhage et al. 2001, 14). One report explained the way security operates here as follows: »Paid-up members who have become victims of crime usually call Mapogo, recount the incident and name suspects. Mapogo then tracks down the alleged offender, demands the whereabouts of the stolen goods and metes out punishment« (ibid., 14).

The commercial accessing of vigilante networks for security services is also a common feature on the Indonesian island of Lombok. In 1994, a group of former thieves established a group called Bujak, which offered a »bounty service« that tracked and returned stolen goods for a fee. Bujak, a study by the International Crisis Group (ICG) observed, eventually »also provided protection in exchange for a monthly payment; customers received stickers showing that they were under Bujak's protection, a deterrent to criminals« (ICG 2003, 14). By the late 1990s Bujak faced increased competition from another anti-crime militia that called itself Amphibi. It »demanded less money than its rival« (15) and soon »claimed to have registered 220,000 active members, nearly 10 per cent of Lombok's population and 25 per cent of all working age males in East Lombok« (16).

As with state-rendered commercial security, from a perspective of political economy the differences between private security companies and informal vigilante groups charging for services are minimal. Both commodify security by providing their services in direct return for economic capital, which is paid voluntarily. It seems, however, that vigilante groups become more commonly established in rural areas with no access to security companies. Moreover, their services generally cost much less than those of professional companies, thus making them affordable to a very wide range of customers, often small local businesses. Finally – and unlike the vast majority of security companies – commercial vigilante groups do not necessarily adhere to a capitalist mode of production. Whereas some may well exploit labor power, others might, conceivably, distribute the surplus values generated equally among their workers.

## CONCLUSION

The distinction between compulsory and commercial security is a central feature in the political economy of security practice. To the extent that it cuts right through established epistemologies of political science, with their emphases on state/non-state or public/private dichotomies, it denotes a new field of academic inquiry. It shifts the main focus from actor-type to the types of relations and exchanges we encounter in security networks. As a brief empirical overview demonstrates, different types of agent assume different positions in both compulsory and commercial alignments. The »state,« it follows, does not matter; it is but one actor among many, which may provide security and accumulate capital in different ways.

A research agenda investigating the political economy of security along the lines of compulsory and commercial alignments needs to address two larger sets of questions, hitherto neglected in the »privatization« debate. First of all, it needs to look into the distinct forms of social and political order that each of the two practices construct. In accordance with which mentalities and rationalities do they identify threats and referent objects to be secured? What techniques and technologies they employ to secure? What are the main conceptual and strategic differences (as well as similarities) between these two basic approaches? Tackling any such question in a serious manner requires a strong empirical focus, directed toward a historical reconstruction of security practice and/or a comparison of different contemporary locales where security is done in a compulsive manner and/or commercially.

A second set of questions, no less in need of empirical clarification, concerns the actual relations between compulsory and commercial security practices. Importantly, although they chart an analytically useful division, they are not necessarily (and, in fact, only rarely) distinct in terms of both their spatial and nodal topography. Compulsory and commercial security operate in the same spaces; some agents may either be simultaneously part of a compulsory and a commercial security formation. The overlap between the two is likely to differ from place to place. Hence, another important question concerns the conditions under which compulsory and commercial security either conflict with or mutually support each other.

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