Introduction

'When you think of private security and international politics, what is the first image that springs to mind?' Over the past few years, we have asked this question dozens of times to groups and audiences in numerous countries and contexts. The answers have been remarkably uniform, usually revolving around burly men in combat fatigues, wrap-around sunglasses and automatic weapons. This is no great surprise: the return of mercenary activities in Angola and Sierra Leone in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War and the extensive involvement of private contractors in both Iraq and Afghanistan have justifiably placed corporate soldiers and private military companies (PMCs) at the centre of much public debate and scholarly enquiry.

Yet the growth and impact of private security extends far beyond the spectacular activities of corporate soldiers and the increased involvement of private companies in warfare and military affairs. In almost every society across the globe, private security has become a pervasive part of everyday life, and in many countries private security personnel now outnumber their public counterparts by a considerable margin. Recent decades have also seen the emergence of private security companies (PSCs) that operate on a global scale. The world's largest PSC, Group4Securicor (G4S), is present in over 110 countries, and, with 585,000 employees, it is the biggest employer on the London Stock Exchange. Engaged in the seemingly mundane protection of life and assets – the guarding of workplaces, shopping malls and universities, the monitoring of alarms and closed-circuit televisions (CCTVs), the provision of risk assessment and management – this aspect of security privatization has become so integrated into our daily activities of work and leisure as to go mostly unnoticed. Perhaps for this reason, it is also the untold story of security privatization in international politics.

In shifting the focus away from the battlefields and the spectacular exploits of the private military towards the phenomenal growth and globalization of commercial private security, this book seeks not only

to broaden the debate about security privatization in international politics, but also to show that the full significance and impact of contemporary processes of privatization cannot be grasped through a focus on the military sector alone. The routine, commonplace activities of commercial private security belie its importance to contemporary social order, and its expansion is crucial to an understanding of world politics and the shifting politics of protection across the globe. There are indications that these developments are gradually becoming more recognized by policy-makers and in public debate. In his capacity as acting president of the European Union (EU), for example, French President Nicolas Sarkozy observed that 'examining the role of private security in overall security in Europe is a way of looking after the everyday security of European citizens' since 'private security firms are being called upon more and more to assist states in providing this protection.'[1] Similarly, the *New York Times*, in the wake of the attacks on three Mumbai hotels in November 2008, made a direct link between private security and protection against terrorist violence, highlighting the increasing importance of private security in the country. 'In much of India', it informed its readers, 'the first line of defense against crime stands just over five and half feet tall, earns less than $100 a month and is armed with little more than a shiny belt buckle.'[2]

This book traces the phenomenal growth of commercial security globally and examines in detail its operations and impacts in specific settings. This is not simply an empirical enterprise – however important that is. It is also a theoretical and political argument about contemporary politics and world order. By widening the empirical lens to include non-militarized forms of private security we seek not only to capture the full scope of security privatization, but also to situate these developments analytically within broader transformations in social forces both within and between states. In particular, we anchor security privatization within the continually expanding contemporary security agenda and place social theories of globalization and

[1] 'Preface from Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic', in Confederation of European Security Services (CoESS) and Institut National de Haute Étude de Sécurité, *Private Security and Its Role in European Security*, White Paper, December 2008, p. 5.
[2] Heather Timmons, 'Security Guards Become the Front Lines in India', *New York Times*, 3 March 2009, p. A1.

neo-liberalism, commodification, risk and moralization at the centre of our analysis.

This perspective shifts our understanding of private security in international politics in numerous ways. While debates about the private military, especially in the early days, often centred on the challenges such actors pose to prevailing structures of authority, legitimacy and global governance, we show how the growth and globalization of private security is embedded in and inseparable from transformations in national and global governance. Rather than private security eroding the power of the state, or threatening its power and authority, its proliferation is linked to changes inside the state, and its power stems not primarily from the barrel of the gun but from its embeddedness in contemporary structures of governance and its links to public forms of power and authority. These transformations have led to the emergence of what we call *global security assemblages*: new security structures and practices that are simultaneously public and private, global and local. Within these assemblages, state power is certainly reconfigured, but it is not necessarily weakened. Instead, the very distinctions between the public and the private, the global and the local are rearticulated and reworked, giving rise to new practices and forms of power that cannot be neatly contained within the geographical boundaries of the nation-state. Within this new geography of security, various security actors interact in a field of tension, structured by the opposition between the public and the private and their different forms of material and symbolic power.

Global security assemblages connect security practices in different parts of the world in complex relations, exercising important impacts on security in specific sites. Our analysis takes Africa as its focus – a continent that is perhaps more than any other identified in both popular and scholarly imagination with the activities of private security. From early colonial times, Africa has been the playground of private military forces, while in the 1990s the continent provided the theatre of war for Executive Outcomes' (EO's) private soldiers. To date, however, the phenomenal recent growth of non-military private security in Africa has gone relatively unnoticed, as has its connections to global transformations and discourses. Yet the continent provides a prime site for investigating the global dynamics of security privatization, and, perhaps precisely because of its relative weakness within the international system, Africa offers a particularly intriguing

opportunity to study the impact of private security on public–private, global–local relations. As a number of analysts have stressed, despite its apparent marginalization by globalization, contemporary Africa is marked by the emergence of new 'transboundary formations' – spaces that defy the neatly defined geographical boundaries of nation-states and that cannot be classified as either local, national or international.[3] By focusing on resource extraction in Nigeria and Sierra Leone, and on urban security in South Africa and Kenya, we show how security provision and governance occur within diverse global assemblages, stretched across territorial boundaries and involving multiple actors, values and discourses. These assemblages have important impacts on the operations of global capital, on the exercise of state power and on who is made secure, insecure, and how. The politics of protection in these specific settings thus reveals not only the extent of global security privatization but also the emergence of new geographies of security and power, with crucial implications for Africa and beyond.

Situating the study of private security

Writing about security in the post-9/11 era of general unease and heightened security concerns is, as Ian Loader and Neil Walker have noted, fraught with difficulties, potential pitfalls and opportunities for misunderstanding.[4] The rhetoric and imperatives of security are seemingly omnipresent in today's society, a fact that is far from always reassuring.[5] Writing about *private* security is perhaps even more difficult and prone to misapprehension. The very idea of private violence stands in a tension-filled relationship to both traditional theoretical conceptions of the state and to deeply held convictions about the proper responsibilities of modern governments, the rights of citizens and principles of democracy. Since the history of state formation is commonly told as the story of the centralization of legitimate violence in the hands of the uniformed agents of the state, its re-emergence

[3] See Thomas Callaghy, Ronald Kassimir and Robert Latham (eds.), *Intervention and Transnationalism in Africa: Global-Local Networks of Power*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
[4] Ian Loader and Neil Walker, *Civilizing Security: Policing and Political Community in a Global Era*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
[5] Mark Neocleous, *Critique of Security*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008.

in the hands of private actors almost inevitably conjures images of a return to a pre-modern, darker age: to a neo-medieval condition of fragmented and competing sovereigns and loyalties, or perhaps to the private force of the financial and industrial 'robber barons' of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with their gangs of armed Pinkertons. For the more futuristically oriented, it evokes fears of the post-modern fortified city, a *Blade Runner* world where the rich barricade themselves behind higher and higher security walls and from the designer fortresses that have become their homes observe the outside as an increasingly dangerous space inhabited not so much by fellow humans as by potential intruders, thieves and killers.[6] Internationally, the phenomenal growth of private military actors raises a different spectre – one of shady mercenary activities in far-flung places or, in more sophisticated assessments, of privatized 'corporate warriors' removed from democratic oversight and accountability, allowing the pursuit of corrupt public interests through violent, private means, while intensifying the destabilization and exploitation of already fragile and poor states.[7]

Providing a critical appraisal of the impacts of private security thus inevitably enmeshes us in wider moral and political debates and controversies. Private security inescapably generates strong feelings, and there is little doubt that the effects and implications of the privatization of force need sustained political analysis. The possible abuses that follow from the ability of private actors to wield force, to influence political agendas, to accumulate knowledge and transfer competences away from the public domain and to move decision making outside democratically accountable forums to private offices are key challenges of our times. It is all the more serious then, that there is a relative dearth of empirical investigations of security privatization, especially outside the industrialized world and in the non-military

[6] For a striking example, see Mike Davis's well-known treatment of Los Angeles in *City of Quartz*, London: Verso, 1990; and for one of the most nuanced and insightful studies in this area, Teresa Caldeira, *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation and Citizenship in São Paulo*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2001.

[7] For particularly useful treatments, see Deborah Avant, *The Market for Force*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005; Abdel-Fatau Musah and J. Kayode Fayemi (eds.), *Mercenaries: An African Security Dilemma*, London: Pluto, 2000; and Peter W. Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003.

sphere. As a consequence, the field has been wide open to speculative and impressionistic generalizations. Captured in a seemingly endless repetition of recycled, second-hand evidence from a limited number of cases and with conclusions that often reflect a priori reasoning rather than sustained empirical research and theoretical reflection, the impact of commercial security, especially in the developing world, has frequently been subject to a peculiar combination of caricature and disregard. This has, in turn, impeded critical appraisal, both theoretically and politically, with preconceived notions of good and bad clouding a comprehensive engagement with the social world. In this book, we adopt a less explicitly normative starting point, focusing instead on power and transformations in contemporary social and political forces. In doing so, we seek both to elucidate the implications of security privatization for the issues of equality, accountability and violence and to demonstrate how the current empowerment of private actors is deeply enmeshed in broader political processes. Coming to terms with these processes, we argue, is an indispensable element in any cogent political and normative appraisal of private security and its global impacts.

A key starting point for such an analysis is the historically constituted division between the public and the private, and the way this has been reflected in the study of international politics and security. As Patricia Owens has recently commented, 'IR [International Relations] has not been very good on the history and theory of the public-private distinction or at conceptualizing how force is constituted transnationally.'[8] Part of the reason for this lies in the fact that distinctions between public and private and inside and outside are both submerged within and foundational to the discipline of International Relations and the study of security, in much the same way as the relationship between the public, the private and security can be seen as constitutive elements of both modern sovereignty and the international system.

In very broad terms, the evolution of modern sovereignty was defined by an increasingly clear distinction between private and

[8] Patricia Owens, 'Distinctions, Distinctions: Public and Private Force', *International Affairs* 85 (5) (2008): 977–90; p. 988. Throughout this book, we follow the convention of using 'International Relations' when referring to the field of study and 'international relations' when referring to the domain of international affairs.

public violence. As part of this process, the private right to wield force and settle grievances through violence was gradually delegitimized and instead monopolized in the hands of public authorities. The very constitution of a 'private' sphere was thus in important ways made possible by the removal of the control of violence and coercion – what we today call 'security' – from private hands into the 'public' or political domain. While there is little doubt that historically the state's monopoly of violence has always been, in Janice Thomson's formulation, the exception rather than the norm, it remains the case that the public nature of protection – of equality before the law and equal protection by officers of the law – is (in theory) among the most important constitutive principles of the modern state and conceptions of sovereignty, and one of the key markers and tests of legitimacy in modern politics.[9] The division between the inside and the outside, or the domestic and the international, emerged alongside these historical processes and embodied a range of liberal democratic values ranging from the general exclusion of the military from domestic politics, to the traditional distinctions between justice within and beyond state boundaries.

It is no exaggeration to say that, generally speaking, the study of security has reflected (and helped reproduce) these boundaries, with the 'inside' the domain of criminology and criminal justice studies and the 'outside' the sphere of war appropriated by International Relations and its sub-field of security studies.[10] In turn, these divisions have not only come to guide analyses and perceptions of what is important and what is not, but also to reify the public and the private, the internal and the external as natural and fixed categories rather than historically and politically constituted ones. That said, it is crucial to recognize that while constructed, these distinctions are far from being simply a set of abstract theoretical devices or disciplinary divides. Notions of public and private, inside and outside are embedded in many of the most powerful institutional and conceptual expressions of modern sovereignty, as well as in deeply held political values. The public–private–security relationship is part of powerful

[9] Janice Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates and Sovereigns: State Building and Extraterritorial Violence in Early Modern Europe*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994.

[10] The classic treatment here is R. B. J. Walker's *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

institutions and practices – it has concrete effects through its role in structuring understandings of (and controversies over) the place of private security and actions that follow from them. Frequently expressed concerns about the erosion of previous boundaries between the public and private force, as well as between internal and external security agencies, such as the increasing role of the police in international issues and the military in domestic security, illustrate both the deeply political nature of these divisions and their practical importance. Moreover, as we show in this book, the designations of public and private, global and local, also constitute important forms of power that actors employ in their struggles for influence within security assemblages, and as such cannot be simply abandoned as irrelevant or anachronistic.

Understanding contemporary private security and its globalization thus requires not only an appreciation that these boundaries are historically constituted, but also a rather more difficult engagement with the ways that they are embodied in modern political institutions and practices. As Owens nicely puts it, this is 'a joint task for historical sociology and international political theory'.[11] Sociologically, we need to capture not only the historical relationship between public and private force, but also the new social forces and rearticulations of the public and private that are part of the striking resurgence of private security. Theoretically, we need to explore how specific articulations of the public–private–security relationship are constitutive features of modern liberal politics and the international system, and how they too are being influenced, challenged and rearticulated through contemporary processes of security privatization.

This means that we need to think of security within categories that can retain the continuing salience of the public–private and national–international divides, while at the same time locating them within wider social transformations in order to see how their shifting configurations reflect and influence how power is organized and legitimated in different historical periods and political settings. A logical place to begin this enquiry is with the state itself. The idea of the state as defined by its monopoly of legitimate violence remains central to political analysis, and nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in studies of private security, where Max Weber's famous definition of

[11] Owens, 'Distinctions, Distinctions', p. 988.

the state in these terms rarely fails to make an appearance.[12] Essential and illuminating as this may be as a starting point for analysis, too narrow a vision of the state's monopoly on violence risks becoming a hindrance, leaving only the options of seeing private security as a straightforward erosion of the state or as delegation by a state whose monopoly and power remain essentially unaltered. As the best analyses of private security have argued, and as we try to demonstrate in the following chapters, the transformations involved are more complex than can be captured in these alternatives and hence require correspondingly multi-layered concepts.

Pierre Bourdieu's variation on Weber's famous formula is helpful in this regard. For Bourdieu, the difficulty with many contemporary appeals to Weber's vision of the state is that unlike Weber himself they too often present the monopoly of legitimate violence as equivalent with or reducible to physical coercion. By contrast, Bourdieu argues that while this form of coercion was essential to state formation, it was only one aspect of a process of concentration that included symbolic and cultural power. Framing this point within the analytic categories of capital and field, he thus argues:

> The state is the *culmination of a process of concentration of different species of capital*: capital of physical force or instruments of coercion (army, police), economic capital, cultural or (better) informational capital, and symbolic capital. It is this concentration as such which constitutes the state as the holder of a sort of meta-capital granting power over other species of capital and over their holders … It follows that the construction of the state proceeds apace with the construction of *a field of power*, defined as the space of play within which the holders of capital (of different species) struggle *in particular* for power over the state …[13]

If we take this as a starting point, the question becomes not whether the state is gaining or losing sovereignty via private security actors, but how its place and relationship to other actors in a field of power is shifting and how, in the process, state power itself is reconfigured.

[12] H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958.

[13] Pierre Bourdieu, 'Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field', in George Steinmetz (ed.), *State/Culture: State Formation after the Cultural Turn*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, (1999): 53–75; pp. 57–8.

Historically, it is clear that the public–private distinction has always reflected particular relations of power at particular moments in time and that 'private' force has long played significant roles in public security. The use of a wide variety of private force for the task of 'public' policing was, for instance, widespread in Europe until the latter decades of the nineteenth century. The same was true in the United States of America (USA), where the activities of one of the most famous – and in some eyes infamous – commercial private security firms, Pinkerton's, provided investigative, coercive and arrest capacities on railways across the country. For a time, the company even policed substantial parts of the city of Chicago, and its often violent role in the suppression of labour disputes in the early part of the twentieth century continues to colour perceptions of the politics of private security today.[14]

The use of private force was also central to imperial expansions and serves to illustrate how different public–private articulations have long been part of global power structures. In the colonies, private force was perhaps even more prevalent than in the metropoles, and the connections between private and public force equally complex. Policing was a central aspect of strategies of imperial domination, but it often bore little resemblance to the idealized public monopoly of legitimized violence associated with the modern state. In fact, imperial rule in Africa and Asia generally relied extensively on private forces, as well as on a range of indigenous structures, chiefs and more or less invented 'traditional' rulers for various policing and security tasks. The British South Africa Company of Cecil Rhodes, for example, had its own paramilitary, mounted infantry force, while later during the colonial period commercial companies such as the Sierra Leone Selection Trust, a subsidiary of De Beers, employed a private police force of thirty-five armed men to protect its diamond concession in the Kono area. Similarly, the first recognizable police force in Kenya was private, in the sense that it was set up by the East Africa Trading

[14] On Pinkerton's, see Frank Morn, *The Eye that Never Sleeps: A History of the Pinkerton's National Detective Agency*, Bloomington, Ind.: University of Indiana Press, 1982. For the history of private security, see Les Johnston, *The Rebirth of Private Policing*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992. On the emergence of the police, see Lucia Zedner, 'Policing before and after the Police: The Historical Antecedents of Contemporary Crime Control', *British Journal of Criminology*, 46 (1) (2006): 78–96.