

'The military mind-set is still too much': security practitioners and the internal tensions of hybrid extractives security arrangements

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In the global south, the local impact of multinational corporations is typically characterised by unequal power relations and violence (Fraser and Larmer, 2010) and no more so than International Oil Companies (IOCs) (Carmody, 2009; Obi and Rustad, 2011). A burgeoning literature has sought to analyse corporate security strategies around extractives and their spatial effects, ranging from notions of extractives enclaves to modalities of hybrid security governance (Enns et al., 2020) and global security assemblages (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2021). Within this literature, it is widely acknowledged that security contractors and practitioners play an important role in territorialising and securitising extraction in the global south and are often seen as powerful symbols of colonial and neoliberal power. Thus far, however, there is less understanding of the ways that security contractors understand the wider social and political context in which they are operating, and how they subsequently shape corporate community engagement strategies.

This article draws on multi-sited fieldwork in Kenya, where oil exploration and appraisal activities in Turkana County has been characterised by ongoing conflict with local communities and tensions around the sharing of revenues. This conflict around oil is not a simple case of 'company vs community' but is embedded in the broader hybrid relations that mediate access to resources and global capital (Enns and Bersaglio, 2015; Lind, 2021). Less well understood, however, are the internal dynamics, politics, and power relations at play *within* hybridised corporate security arrangements, and how these subsequently interface with politics and governance at multiple scales. This article focuses on a network of security professionals that coalesced around the oil companies, including interviews and ethnography with security contractors, consultants, and practitioners working within and adjacent to the oil companies. It argues that these security practitioners – and the way they understood and imagined the social and political dynamics of Turkana – are crucial for understanding corporate community relations, including the tensions between national and local stakeholders.

The security professionals that the oil companies were influenced by initially made their recommendations based on engagements with national actors and crucially failed to account for the emerging power of the county government. As the security strategy became increasingly incoherent and reactive, local political entrepreneurs became increasingly vocal and demanding. Here, the relationship between extraction and security became less straightforward. Corporate attempts to extract oil became increasingly scuppered by an emboldened constellation of local actors who sought

to extract money and resources from the oil company. A key example of this extraction through (in)security is the growth of a local private security industry that emerged partly because of the oil extraction and managed to displace established international private security companies from lucrative oil contracts.

As international security practitioners struggled to come to terms with changing political and social dynamics in Turkana, they implemented a variety of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects. To explain this, the article uses the lens of 'corporate counterinsurgency', understood as an embodied set of practices and ideas distinctive to the work that military veterans perform in commercial settings. This explains how the experiences and memories of past counterinsurgencies feature in the subjectivities as well as material and spatial practices of extractives security practitioners. Yet the 'hearts and minds' that required winning were not only those of intransigent local populations; they were also within the oil company itself. The white ex-military security contractor working for an oil company in Africa is often seen as a symbol of power and repression. But in Turkana, this identity became increasingly fragile. As the imaginaries and expectations of these security contractors clashed with social and political realities on the ground, a crisis of security strategy also became a crisis of personal and professional identity and authority. Part of this fall from grace entailed a reinvention of professional identity, as security practitioners tried to reassert themselves through an emphasis on data, human rights, legal reform, and looked to NGOs.

The article concludes by reflecting on how security practitioners are a fundamental yet overlooked aspect of extractives companies social and political engagement. It stresses that understanding extractives security and resource conflicts requires looking beyond an ostensibly coherent and intentional oil company and its relation to citizens, and towards the internal dynamics, politics, and power relations at play within corporate/hybrid security arrangements.