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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Tensions of Modernity: Privilege, Precarity, and Colonial Nostalgia among European Security Contractors in East Africa

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Abstract

Private security work can be a brutal world of short-term contracts, exploitation, and under-regulation, where the imperative of profit is expected to trump collective notions of military brotherhood. Why then do so many demobilized soldiers turn to it as a vocation? While a rich body of work has revealed the vulnerabilities of demobilized military life, ethnographic investigations into how contractors experience and make sense of precarity are less common. Drawing on fieldwork with military veterans of European descent working and living in East Africa, this article argues that a central, yet underexplored, feature of contemporary security work is colonial nostalgia. Some contractors read the travelogues of colonial adventurers, while others trace their family genealogy to ancestral colonial frontier soldiers. A few even write their own memoirs in similar fashion. Writing, reading, and living the colonial past through this *contractor canon* serves several present-day functions. First, the parallels between risk-taking colonial adventurers and the kind of rugged individualism associated with *homo economicus* masks the tensions and fissures that emerge from soldiers' discharge from the military and subsequent remobilization as privatized contractors. Secondly, colonial nostalgia forms part of a larger political critique of Western military interventions, of which many of these contractors experienced first-hand. Here, private security work is imagined as replicating an older, more effective tradition of frontier soldiering that is rooted in a logic of settler-colonialism. Finally, fantasies of a colonial past feed into contractors' attempts to market themselves to clients and to organize their everyday work.

Keywords: settler-colonialism; private security; Kenya; Somalia; Africa; capitalism; war; nostalgia; race; empire

Introduction

Pulling up in a large black Range Rover with tinted windows, Mark jovially barks an order to a hotel employee and eases into a chair opposite me.[1] An experienced private

[1]Unless stated, names of interviewees are pseudonyms. Some locations have also been concealed to preserve confidentiality.

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military contractor, the former employee of several international and regional security firms in East Africa, and now owner of his own company, he is thick set, dark shades a permanent fixture on his face. We sit on pink plastic chairs parallel to a child's playground in the forecourt of a disconcertingly empty hotel bar in Mombasa on the Kenyan coast. Mark orders enough *nyama choma* for a small village, and over the course of the next four and a half hours, punctuated only by the habitual sound of beer bottles being prized open, recalled exuberant and glamorized tales of his experiences as a security professional in East Africa.[2]

Mark told stories of how he had set up a private military camp in Somalia, negotiated directly with both pirate groups and al-Shabaab, and stormed a captured vessel armed only with shotguns that had been acquired through private hunting licenses. He remembered a violent attack on a gold mine he was managing in Tanzania, of his aircraft being shot, and later how he had provided VIP protection for an A-list celebrity in Ethiopia. Ultimately, and apparently much to the incredulity of the UK Home Office, he had rescinded his British citizenship in favor of a Kenyan passport. Now, he explained, there were fewer restrictions on importing and selling firearms, and he was free to develop lucrative commercial partnerships with regional military and police elites. There was much talk of weapons, as Mark candidly mused over the relative lethality of different assault rifles, at times leaning over to show pictures on his smartphone of the various firearms he owned and sold. At one point he even interrupted the conversation to loudly finalize an arms deal on his phone: "It's one thousand rounds you're after, right?"

Mark's elaborate and at times contradictory tales blurred the lines between fiction and reality. He was eager to present East Africa as a space of exception, a frontier where he was a free agent, able to pick and choose his adventures and with total autonomy over his life. Mark reveled in this apparent newfound freedom, even trading in his passport as an index of his commitment to this new life. For him, East Africa was clearly more than a place of work—it was also a new home where he and his family could settle.

As the conversation progressed, the topic turned to the aging contractor's idealized retirement plan. Explaining he had bought a large plot of land in rural Kenya where he was building himself a farm and a cottage, Mark imagined himself planting "all indigenous trees, all Kenyan … and then [I'll] sit up there on the porch with my two Labradors and a shotgun."[3] During our conversation one of the Kenyan laborers working on his land rang: "If things aren't done, I'll find a whip myself, sawa?" he warned, in violent language drenched in colonial connotation—"They start at nine o'clock in the morning and they leave at five, I don't care if they have a funeral or their mother's sick, sawa?"[4]

Mark's invocations of an imagined colonial past are not unique. Many other security professionals working in East Africa situate their present-day experiences within a constant revisiting, reevaluating, reimagining, and reliving of a colonial past. This article argues that we should take this colonial nostalgia seriously as a response to the economic and psychic precarity of modern contracting work, as well as part of a larger political critique of Western interventions and the military as an institution.

[2]*Nyama choma* is Swahili for roasted or grilled meat.

[3]Interview with Mark, 24 June 2017.

[4]Ibid.

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Moreover, imperial yearning is not simply an underexplored facet of being a security contractor, but actively shapes the way that contractors act in the world, including how they market themselves to clients and organize their activities.

Most accounts of contemporary private security locate the end of the Cold War as a watershed moment that birthed the "new" modern private security contractor (Percy 2008; Kinsey 2006; Avant 2005). These narratives typically emphasize causal arguments associated with the end of the Cold War, such as structural transformations in the post-Cold War security environment, the neoliberal revolution, and the globalization of business practices. However, most of the contractors described here—mostly white, male, military veterans—do not see themselves as globalized soldiers-turned-businessmen. Rather, their work has structural and psychological continuities with historical forms of force over the *longue durée*, through which they re-cast themselves not as men in suits but as frontier soldiers and colonial adventurers. What prevailing descriptions of "corporate soldiers" fail to account for is that many of these men are not so much embracing neoliberal capitalism as trying to escape it.

At least partially accounting for this disjuncture is the fact that most descriptions of private security contractors are given by those outside of the profession, by journalists, filmmakers, or academics. There is a deficit of sustained ethnographic research on security contractors. This is in no small part due to the practical difficulties in conducting long-term ethnographic research with them; the places these actors operate in are often remote or unstable, while the contractors themselves are typically difficult to access and media averse. Yet it is also connected to prevailing assumptions about the military and its rendering of military bodies and minds as "docile automaton" (Smith 2008), and to a conceptual language rooted in nation-state ontologies of force that privilege state violence and the ideal military form of the citizen-soldier army (Barkawi 2017).

There is also often an aversion to doing sustained fieldwork with people implicitly considered to be in some way unlikeable or repugnant. Indeed, as Agnieszka Pasieka (2019) observes in her research with far-right activists in Europe, the focus tends to be on the ideologies, or the underlying socio-economic causes for the movements, rather than the people themselves. Consequently, we know a lot about radical right-wing ideology but understand a lot less about the multifaceted lives of the "unlikeable" individuals who hold these beliefs and their unique backgrounds and experiences. Ultimately, this empirical deficit results in a kind of othering and exoticizing that erases the everyday complexities, ambiguities, and peculiarities of the people involved.

This article offers an account of a hitherto unexplored group of geographically disparate but relatively socially homogenous transnational security practitioners working and living in East Africa.[5] It draws on ten months of in-depth interviews and ethnographic observations during 2017, supported by archival research in Nairobi and London and documentary analysis of official and company reports. Multi-sited fieldwork traversed a diverse range of locations across Kenya, Somalia, and Tanzania, including oilfields, a mining enclave, "green zones," private ranches,

[5]"Contractors" in this paper includes people working for private military and security companies, security consultants, military trainers, humanitarian security professionals, and corporate-risk-management professionals.

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and commercial and maritime hubs. Across these locations a general picture emerges of a transnationally networked group of security professionals marked by forms of solidarity that extend far beyond national identity, individual careerism, or the logic of the market.[6]

The article proceeds as follows. I first contextualize the rise of a security industry in East Africa while paying particular attention to the modern industry's connections to a settler-colonial past. I then discuss the precarity of present-day security contracting and the fissures and tensions that are generated by the remobilization of military life in the private sphere. Next, I show how colonial nostalgia is an integral aspect of contemporary contracting in East Africa, focusing on how contractors read, write, and talk about the colonial past with reference to their present-day situation. I identify three concrete examples of how colonial nostalgia functions in the present: (1) to make sense of or explain the economic and psychic precarity of privatization; (2) as part of a larger political critique of state and military intervention; and (3) as a marketing tool and organizing principle for everyday private security activities. I conclude by reflecting on the tensions between modernity and the colonial past, and the enduring significance and intersections between race and class, and imperialism and capitalism.

The Precarity of Private Security

Beginning in the mid-2000s, East Africa's regional security industry saw a new wave of Euro-American security professionals come to live and work in the region. The initial catalyst was an upsurge in Somali piracy from 2008 that resulted in growing demand for armed maritime security and specialist kidnap and ransom services. As maritime demand dipped from late 2012, high oil prices and recent finds in Kenya and Uganda prompted a flurry of onshore and offshore exploration and appraisal activities in the region, providing further opportunities for security contractors. Elsewhere, contractors reoriented themselves toward providing support for the U.S.-backed military intervention and state-building agenda in Somalia, while others found work in the burgeoning humanitarian security sector or in the militarized field of wildlife conservation. An important backdrop to this influx of contractors seeking work in East Africa was the contraction of Western militaries following the aftereffects of the 2008 global financial crisis and the fading wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Importantly, privatization was actively embraced by many of these militaries themselves. In 2013 the influential management consultancy firm McKinsey & Company, which had been hired as the British army's "strategic partner," recommended an enhanced program of outsourcing, citing, among other reasons, the costs of health care and pensions for veterans.[7]

[6]Here a brief word on methodology and my own uncomfortable gendered and raced positionality is important: Being a white man in my early twenties who liked to play rugby and football and did not mind sitting in a bar until 4 a.m., I possessed some relevant cultural capital that made it easier to access this particular community. Many of my respondents were also considerably older than myself, which probably made me seem less threatening. While I always stated upfront that I was a Ph.D. student and stressed my academic freedom of interpretation, on multiple occasions I was mistaken for being in the military or assumed to be working for a private security firm.

[7]For example, see Chinn 2013.

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So how easy is the transition from military service to private security work? Perspectives on private security sometimes take for granted that under conditions of neoliberal capitalism demobilized soldiers can easily swap military fatigues for suits and ties (Singer 2017; Abrahamsen and Williams 2010). There is, however, a growing and rich body of research that emphasizes the vulnerabilities and contradictions of military service. As Ken MacLeish observes, periods of demobilization are often especially traumatic; marked by exhaustion and psychological stress, relationship issues, substance abuse, and criminality (2013). Zoe Wool (2015) has also powerfully illustrated the vulnerabilities of veterans and the complexities of their experiences, highlighting various struggles to returning to normalcy, including marital issues, and enduring habits of training.

While the tensions and fissures that develop specifically from the process of privatization are under-researched, it is well known that many veterans would happily return to the military despite the hardships and trauma they face. This is what MacLeish calls *churn*, the ways through which the "routinized extraction of war-making labor power" renders military lives "fungible"—disposable yet available (2020: 196). The crucial point here is that one of the things that makes war possible is economic and structural instability that renders potential soldiers both mobilizable and disposable (ibid., 197; see also Moore 2019). Rather than a "transition" or change of occupation, I argue that PMSC work is better understood as a kind of *remobilization* of military life, albeit one marked by contradiction. For many demobilized soldiers, the churn of security work is an opportunity to reject their ex-military label and the precariousness and vulnerability it implies. In doing so they challenge the military's own distinction between separate civilian and military spheres and established boundaries between war and non-war and military and civilian life. Take Toby, a contractor working in Somalia:

> A lot of it was boredom, frustration. trying to find my place in life, shall we say. I think a lot of ex-military struggle when they come out the forces to really adapt to civilian life, I was certainly one of those.… I joined the military when I was sixteen and kind of been in it ever since, so it was a struggle for me … a matter of trying things, experimenting with different opportunities, finding out they're not for me, and then coming back to square one basically. This is what I know, this is what I do best, even though we try other things, more often than not we seem to come back to what we know.[8]

Of course, this does not mean that private security work is an easy or natural decision. Often, demobilized soldiers came to private security work after other options had been foreclosed. As Colin, another Somalia-based contractor describes, "I served in the French army, marine infantry, parachute regiment, special forces, I had a parachute accident, so I had to get out earlier than what I had originally planned, after that I tried to get back to university, history, whatever, and then ended up doing ships off Somalia."[9]

Transitioning to civilian life often entails a disruption to the routines and structures of military life, and some contractors saw that private security work

[8]Interview with Toby, 8 Aug. 2017.
[9]Interview with Colin, 7 Aug. 2017.

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might save ailing family relations. Several explained that the several-weeks-on, several-weeks-off pattern of PMSC work reflected an arrangement that their families had become accustomed to through their years in the military.[10] Of course, some also saw PMSC work as a way to escape broken marital relationships and pursue new romantic adventures, including a few who openly had second "African" wives. In contrast to civilian life, remobilizing through PMSC work means reconnecting with the wider military community, with people with "the right motivations […] integrity, *Sandhurst* integrity where you will do what is right even if it is unpopular."[11] Underscoring this was a desire to be relevant after demobilization. As one contractor explained, "I feel I am needed. They need me…. I can see that my knowledge is needed, highly needed."[12]

Of course, working in and for a PMSC is not the same as national military service. Many contractors struggled with the different priorities and hierarchies, especially the new figure of "the client." Clients, I have been told time and again, do not understand security and are only concerned with the need to "cut security costs." They do not give contractors adequate budgets or the necessary resources to do their job properly, which results in a security industry engaged in a miserable "race to the bottom," as each company tries to undercut the other. In fact, many contractors made it crystal clear that their duty to either the client or the corporate hierarchies they were often embedded in was a firm second to their collective loyalty to each other. As one contractor explains, "It doesn't matter if you have Lord this or that or MBE this or that heading your company … when the tire hits the road … that's what matters."[13] This sentiment was reiterated again and again, and it often felt as though there was some kind of guilt about even recognizing the existence of *the client.*

Testament to this logic of remobilization is that military values often supersede commercial logic. Some security consultants will as a matter of loyalty and principle only work for one company or person. Speaking of one such firm, run by a highly decorated former Special Forces persona, a non-military analyst described how, "some of them have this absolute loyalty to Alex, forget the company, just Alex…. some of them say basically I will not take a job with any other maritime [security] companies, it will be betrayal!… Even though they're consultants."[14] Another contractor explained this behavior as "the Royal Marine thing, that's the military thing. That loyalty, it's blind loyalty."[15]

Neoliberalism is more than just the literal monetizing and marketing of things and activities, but also entails disseminating rational market logic through diverse human spheres of activity and thought, even in areas where there is no direct monetary gain (Peck 2010). A central tension revolved around the fact that while contractors' military identities had been constructed in collective terms through intensive training, survival in the commercial security world required them to market themselves as individuals. This results in significant dissonance. For example, trust and loyalty were frequently stated to be fundamental to security work: "You can only

[10]Author's field notes, Sept. 2017.

[11]Interview with Simon, 31 July 2017.

[12]Interview with Gregor, 2 Sept. 2017.

[13]Interview with Nigel, 8 Aug. 2017.

[14]Interview with Darren, 2 June 2017. The owner's name is also a pseudonym.

[15]Interview with Karl, 3 June 2017.

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work with somebody you absolutely trust."[16] However, a common gripe was the lack of trust in corporate settings: "A lot of the guys in the private industry will tell you they're always striving to get back to that [military brotherhood] but it's never there because there is no loyalty from company to [employee], it's all one sided, your loyalty to the company but as soon as the company can cut bottom line, y'know, they'll get rid of you, and that's just the reality of the work."[17]

Many contractors therefore found that their loyalty went unrewarded. They were cast aside when not needed, and at times ruthlessly exploited by a market that was severely unregulated. There tends to be a class hierarchy within the security industry that broadly reflects that of the military, whereby former officers received the highest pay and more stable, salaried desk-based managerial roles while regular soldiers were paid less and mostly performed operational duties on a contract-by-contract basis. Lack of regulation manifested in mutual suspicion and attempts at self-regulation among contractors. A common allegation is that one or another contractor is a "*Walty Mitty*," British military slang for impersonators who deceive (on the basis of rank, regiment, or medals won) or are motivated by personal vanity.

As such, while the spectacularly violent or corrupt exploits of PMSCs such as Erik Prince's Blackwater that tend to hit the headlines and capture population imaginations of private security, everyday security work is a far more mundane affair. For most contractors around the world, their occupational link to violence is not so exceptional, but simply a mode of work—a means through which to participate in the global economy.[18] While contractors are often characterized as money-hungry freelancers or mercenaries, as profiteers of precarity rather than its victims, the reality is that security work is itself an inherently insecure occupation. While some undoubtedly enjoy this type of contract-to-contract work and the mobility and lifestyle that it affords (Norman 2023) many more experience frustration and tension due to the fact that their corporate remobilization did not resolve the precarity of being discharged from the military. As one disgruntled oil executive working in East Africa cynically put it: "The most fundamental motivation is … they're not fit for anything else…. They won't admit it [but] private security offers an opportunity [to] believe that it is better than it is."[19]

The remobilization of soldiers in corporate settings therefore produces many tensions and contradictions. This precarity is connected to vulnerabilities that emerge from demobilization, the intrusion of neoliberal practices into spheres of thought and action, and the impact of specific wars and transformations in military institutions. Of course, precarity is not experienced equally by all contractors. Under neoliberal market conditions, the class divisions between officers and lower-ranking soldiers are reproduced, with some higher-ranking individuals adapting to the business environment while others find their loyalty and labor exploited. Moreover, in highlighting the vulnerability of these contractors I am by no means absolving them of their role in sustaining hierarchies and exploitation, nor am I equivalenting their precarity to other, less privileged military labor working across the world. Many of those operating in East Africa were from an officer class, which

[16]Interview with Jeff, 16 June 2017.

[17]Interview with Luke, 22 June 2017.

[18]Hoffman (2011) brilliantly illustrates this in his work with militias in West Africa, who he argues are effectively playing a post-Fordist economic role in a global market.

[19]Interview with Peter 9 Sept. 2017.

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tends to correspond with higher social class, and most were white. These European contractors sit at the apex of regional and global labour hierarchies that systematically exploit ex-military labour from sub-Saharan Africa and Indian subcontinent. The precarity they experience is clearly different to those of third country national contractors working in Iraq and Afghanistan (Coburn 2018; Chisholm 2014) or the lower-class military labor employed in the U.S. military machine (Brown and Lutz 2007). Yet they are also arguably subject to greater public criticism and allegations of mercenaryism.

What distinguishes these individuals from other private military and security contractors working across the globe is the intersection between race and class in the specific context of East Africa. While Britain's Kenya Colony was constructed as "white man's country" (Jackson 2011) it was not just any white men that could settle there. Kenya was a place of elite privilege, imagined as an aristocratic playground set in pristine nature, where one could escape the ordinary rules of society. This imaginary is to some extent still alive today, and partly explains the contemporary allure of Africa among certain former soldiers, especially from higher ranks. Today, most European security contractors live lives of relative luxury in affluent enclaves of the country that are themselves secured by a very different class of private security contractors: low-paid, unarmed Kenyan guards working menial twelve-hour shifts. Because of these privileges, these contractors also do not have to worry about the Kenyan counterterror state and its violent policing in the way that everyday Kenyan citizens do (Gluck, 2017).

The *Longue Durée* of Soldierly Work in East Africa

In this particular political economy of contracting, the relationship between contemporary economic and psychic precarity and a fascination with a colonial past is especially salient. While the contemporary security industry in East Africa is mostly defined by events beginning in the late 2000s, it is also connected to longer patterns in the circulation of military personnel, institutions, and ideas since the late colonial period. Its origins can be traced to former members of the British colonial police in both Kenya and Uganda who decided to stay following independence and transplanted their skills to the domain of private security, mostly securing the private property of other white settlers. Several of the major man-guarding firms active today were created by European veterans of the colonial police, and another was formed by a British military veteran of the Mau Mau counterinsurgency.[20] In some cases a direct generational link remains. At least one former member of the colonial police remains on the board of a prominent Kenyan private security firm, while multiple offspring of former colonial military or police who stayed are also established in the security business.[21]

The contemporary industry must also be seen within the context of an enduring circulation of military personnel between the UK and Kenya since the late colonial period. Under the 1919 soldier resettlement scheme, the area of white settlement in the former Kenya colony expanded by a third and was settled by over six hundred British World War I veterans of "pure European origin," most of them officers from

[20] Interviews with Todd, 12 Sept. 2017; Tom, 31 Mar. 2017; and Bill, 30 Mar. 2017.

[21] Ibid.

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Britain's elite (Duder 1993). Most were representatives of power and privilege, often with high-ranking military backgrounds, and it is unsurprising that Kenya became known as the "par excellence retired officer's colony" (ibid.: 69). Private security has therefore historically been an important vocation for demobilized police and soldiers of European origin who settled in East Africa. Until the early 2000s, however, this work was largely limited to the man-guarding of private property.[22]

During the early 2000s the UK military presence in Kenya peaked once again, this time under the pretext of the War on Terror. The British Army Training Unit in Kenya (BATUK), based in the old colonial town of Nanyuki in central Kenya, expanded significantly during this period. BATUK has been a permanent military base in Kenya since independence, but after the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan it was transformed from colonial backwater into one of the UK's foremost overseas military bases. A number of contractors involved in the security world in East Africa had passed through these military institutions.[23] Other, higher-ranking contractors had been military attaches at the British embassies across the region but opted to stay in the region as private security became more lucrative. As one put it, "By sheer coincidence, we were all here when it [piracy] happened. And each of us in our way have made it work for us."[24] Just as former colonial military and police sought private security roles upon deciding to stay in East Africa following decolonization, so too did some of those who passed through BATUK, the BPST, or as military attachés for the embassies. One of them explained, "You got guys who retire here, and then don't move on. And you've got guys who've experienced life here and then want to come back … and you get guys who've served overseas and then come back home on their Kenyan passport."[25] This quote also indicates the continued involvement of Kenyans of European descent. While comparatively small in number, white Africans (mostly of Kenyan or South African citizenship) remain influential in the East African private security sector, marketing their security expertise based on a purportedly superior knowledge of the wider region and unparalleled local networks. Some of them had a military background, usually through service in the British military. A few also formed part of a much older "white African" military network, having fought with the infamous South African PMSC Executive Outcomes across sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s.

The Contractor Canon: Reading, Writing, Talking, and Feeling Empire

This brief sketch of the development of the contemporary security industry reveals continuities in soldierly work stretching from the late colonial period to the present day. Of course, that the neoliberal outsourcing of war has its roots in imperial military experiences is by no means a new argument. Noah Coburn, for example, shows how the outsourcing agenda of the U.S. military in Afghanistan was built on the practices of the British Empire (2018; see also Moore 2019). Amanda Chisholm (2014) has also highlighted how the material and cultural status of Ghurka private security guards—specifically their disadvantageous pay and working conditions relative to white

[22]Interviews with Todd, Tom, Paul (same dates as above).
[23]For example, interview with Kenny, 16 June 2017.
[24]Interview with Brian, 1 Sept. 2017.
[25]Interview with Dom, 27 Mar. 2017.

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Western peers—is the outcome of the potent intersection between neoliberal economic practices and colonial histories. However, much of this work focuses on third-country nationals working as migrant military labor for Western militaries, usually in non-military roles such as cooks and cleaners. For the white European demobilized soldiers working at the higher echelons of the global private security industry, the relationship to an imagined colonial past is not only structural, but also emotional.

Contractors read, write, and talk about the colonial past through a variety of mediums and contexts, from oral storytelling at the bar, to watching films, to sarcastic "memes" shared on closed "contractor only" Facebook groups. Travel writing, however, is one of the more interesting examples of how this colonial nostalgia manifests. Reading historical texts is not an activity commonly associated with private security workers. Nevertheless, some do situate their experiences of war within the context of other wars and the constant revisiting, reevaluating, reimagining, and reliving of the past. Popular among some, especially British contractors, are travel writings from British colonial and postcolonial military figures stationed across East Africa, and particularly Somalia. Many more still have not read these texts directly but are aware of and reference them. One such text was Victorian scholar-explorer Richard Burton's 1856 *First Footsteps in East Africa*, an account of his failed attempt to explore the Somali interior.[26] Also popular were the memoirs of a British colonial officer posted to Somaliland in World War II, Gerald Hanley, in his autobiographical *Warriors: Life and Death among the Somalis.*[27] Another contractor was reading *A Tear for Somalia*, a highly romanticized account by British officer Douglas Collins, who led a unit of Somali Gendarmerie in Somaliland during World War II, before making his name as a "white hunter" and transitioning into the Kenyan safari business in the late 1950s.[28] From the postwar period there was a travelogue by a former Somaliland Scout, then self-styled "mercenary" in Oman, and later PMSC contractor Colonel Bryan Ray, who recounts his experiences of "frontier soldiering" in *Dangerous Frontiers: Campaigning in Somaliland and Oman.*[29]

These texts, spanning the colonial and immediate postcolonial periods and mentioned or referenced in my company multiple times, imagine and re-live the phenomenon of "frontier soldiering" from a British perspective. Burton's, Hanley's, and Ray's travelogues form part of what I call a "contractor canon" of texts that underscores not only the historical but also the moral and political dimensions of contemporary private security work. Ideas drawn from these texts are gestated, reflected upon, exchanged, and reified within the isolated confines of the heavily securitized oil camp, airport compound, or naval vessel, where the contemporary contractor may spend weeks or months at a time.[30]

[26]Burton 2019.

[27]Hanley 2004. Several years later I was in Hargeisa, interviewing diaspora youth for a different research project. One of them asked me out of the blue if I had read Gerald Hanley? I said, "Yes, why?" "All white guys do that," he said, laughing.

[28]Collins 1980; interview with Craig, 11 June 2017.

[29]Ray 2008.

[30]This did not occur at every field site I spent time in. It seemed more prevalent where there was an established contractor community and among those who had made contracting a greater part of their identity.

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There is growing recognition that military veterans are not only consumers but also active *producers* of histories of war that are penned mostly outside of the academy (Barkawi 2017; Brown and Lutz 2007). Importantly, this contractor canon is continually being expanded by contemporary private security operators. I have seen or been sent texts published by contractors who recount their contemporary experiences in East Africa in the style of the aforementioned colonial travelogues; for example, one such published book sent to me displayed a similar structure and style.[31] A review on its back cover reads, "Greg is the quintessential English adventurer. He doesn't mind getting his hands dirty in dangerous places. But always with impeccable manners and an ironic smile. And he can write. —Mike G, former 22 SAS soldier, publisher, round-the-world-alone-sailor, and entrepreneur." Others have taken to blogging the return of "frontier soldiering."[32]

Why does it matter if these contractors do not act in the world as neoliberal subjects—as veterans in suits—but as colonial adventurers? I argue that these travelogues and other forms of colonial nostalgia inform the present-day conditions of security contracting in several important ways and shape how its practitioners act in the world. First, they allow contractors to reclaim agency in the face of privatization by recasting the precarity of their role in terms of colonial adventurism and a tradition of frontier soldiering that celebrates individual risk-taking and freedom. Second, colonial nostalgia forms part of a larger critique of Western states' military and political interventions overseas, which many of these contractors themselves took part in. Finally, fantasies and tropes of the colonial past inform how contractors market themselves and organize their activities in the present.

"Right on the boundary of good": Reimagining Privatization as Colonial Adventure

Travelogues help contractors to make sense of their own privatization and of the precarity that results from this. We have already seen that the tension between collective sacrifice and rational individualism is a defining feature of contemporary private security work. The figure of the colonial adventurer offers a way to reconcile the demands of *homo economicus* while retaining a sense of collective soldierly identity. Collectively, the aforementioned texts allow contemporary contractors to construct an imagined rectilinear timeline with colonial military-adventurers such as Richard Burton at one end, Hanley and Ray somewhere in the middle, and themselves at the end. For contractors, situating their contemporary role(s) within the tradition of such frontier adventurers connects contracting to a life of meaning, personal growth, and great material and social reward in the face of hardship and risk.

There are obvious parallels between risk-taking colonial adventurers and the kind of rugged individualism associated with *homo economicus*. The early days of private armed security was, in the words of one highly respected maritime security professional, "based on people's experience of what was right and wrong … based on their military background. There were no rules on the high sea. Y'know, once

[31] Waggett 2007. See also Yurkin 2015; and Chase and Pezzullo 2017.

[32] Cole 2019.

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you're out of a country's territorial waters, and if you're in Somali waters, who cares?"[33] At the same time, this narrative of freedom and individualism conceals the real beneficiaries of the deployment of PMSC contractors: the clients and shareholders, including multinational corporations and state militaries who can depend on flexible outsourcing. Embracing the notion of frontier soldiering may also help to address the *churn* of military life, their uncaring treatment at the hands of the state as well as the sudden lack of military backup that contractors experience. As one bluntly put it, "There's no helicopters coming to save you."

Beyond coming to terms with their own privatization, colonial fantasizing allows contracting to be rationalized not as an option of last-resort, or even a form of work, but as a distinctive lifestyle. While ideals of freedom, adventurism, and risk-taking are not unique to East African security contractors, they are probably intensified by the particular historical and contemporary context of the region. The allure of a life in East Africa, and Kenya specifically, is at least partly related to enduring colonial tropes about Africa as a place of personal liberation, opportunity, and freedom for white Europeans, unburdened by the vicissitudes and social stagnation of the metropoles. As Will Jackson (2011) shows, Kenya colony was constructed through the convergence of two histories: colonial rule and international tourism. As the colonial grasp on political power waned, a new project materialized: to market the Kenya colony as a commodity through recursive tropes of pristine nature and life. A key point here is that these tropes are not only reproduced in accounts by colonial settlers, but in ongoing writings after independence. Demobilized soldiers continue to be drawn to life in East Africa because of these perpetuated imaginations of a better (colonial) life.

Some security professionals, especially those of British and white Kenyan identity, live in Karen, a suburb on the fringes of Nairobi with a high-income European population. Karen is generally considered to be named after Karen Blixen, a Danish settler-colonial landowner and author (under the pseudonym Isak Dinesen) of the colonial memoir *Out of Africa*, whose coffee plantation occupied the land where the suburb now exists. Although technically part of Nairobi, Karen feels isolated, with dirt tracks leading to clusters of colonial cottages, replete with spacious verandas, adjacent to verdant horse enclosures, that give it the feeling of a colonial frontier town stuck in history. As contemporary "expatriate" enclaves are perpetuated, they stand as material reminders of the colonial past. Spaces such as Karen remain associated with the legacy of the "white mischief" of the British aristocrats and adventurers who settled in colonial Kenya's "Happy Valley" between the 1920s and 1940s and became renowned for their decadent and hedonistic lifestyles (Berman and Lonsdale 1992: 1).

This "Out of Africa" appeal—an attraction to romanticized notions of life in Africa—was frequently claimed as a motivation for European security contractors wanting to not only work but also settle in East Africa. Some contractors conceived of the region as not just a physical frontier but also a moral one, where the ordinary rules of (Western) "civilization" do not apply. As one contractor described, it was "the Wild West…. [We were] operating on the edge, we were right on the boundary of good."[34] The colonies had also been marketed as a place where men could indulge their sexual fantasies and freedoms away from Western norms. Speaking of the allure of private

[33]Interview with Brian, 1 Sept. 2017.
[34]Interview with Matt, 18 Sept. 2017.

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security contracting in Kenya, one interlocuter reasoned, “The UK is seen as grown up. This is still seen as frontier. You can get away with a lot more shit here.”[35]

Social spaces within these enclaves are also saturated with the artefacts and symbols of empire. At one “expatriate” pub in Karen a sign reading “cowboys, leave your guns at the bar” until recently hung by the entrance.[36] The sign was a play on “Kenya cowboy,” a common trope deployed to characterize a Swahili-speaking, shorts-wearing person, usually a white African. Elsewhere, contractors might play golf together at the former colonial Karen Country Club, while PMSCs have even sponsored horse races, another decidedly colonial pastime, at the Ngong racecourse parallel to Karen.[37] These spaces, littered with “imperial debris” (Stoler 2008), are not mere archaic vestiges of a bygone imperial era, but culturally strategic spaces for the (re)formation of groups and identities premised on notions of colonial whiteness and the exercising of elite power.

Regardless of the fantasy of elite lifestyle, lived precarity also underwrote both the settler-colonial experience and contemporary security contractors’ desires to work and live in East Africa. As Brett Shadle (2012) observes, settler violence in Kenya was born out of powerlessness; “perpetually on the verge of bankruptcy, unable to rely on unquestioning state support, surrounded by thousands upon thousands of ‘savages,’ settlers had to assert power.” This sense of precarity persists into the present for the white community in Kenya. Janet McIntosh in her ethnography of elite groups shows how the descendants of white settlers in Kenya continue to grapple with inner self-doubt and anxiety (2016). According to her, the incoherence of their position produces a particular crisis of identity that she calls “structural oblivion” to describe “a state—a subject position—of ignorance, denial, and ideology that emerges from an elite social structural position … constituted by the refusal of certain implications of social structure” (ibid.: 10).

Colonial nostalgia therefore viscerally reveals how whiteness and racialized labor hierarchies are central to the vocation of private security. It is the white thread that connects the frontier soldiers to present-day security work. Foundational to the white settler’s position is a continued belief in rational liberal individualism and a capitalist model of economy that in turn serves to reify racial and class boundaries. White Kenyans remain a small but influential group within the East African security industry. Indeed, some scholars have attributed the recent founding of private security companies by white Kenyans to their growing sense of psychic and socio-economic insecurity (McIntosh 2016). Private security arose with the effort to reconcile with the white Kenyan loss of political power, but a reconciliation through which colonial whiteness could be maintained. In East Africa, private security work undertaken by Euro-Americans and colonial nostalgia are familiar bedfellows because they are both fundamentally responses to the tension between hierarchy and precarity.

“We didn’t run India that way, we didn’t run Kenya that way”: Critiquing State Intervention

Colonial fantasizing also engenders critique and transgression. It may be mobilized to criticize the politics behind current and past wars, rail against societal trends such as

[35]Interview with Peter, 9 Sept. 2017.

[36]Author’s field notes, n.d.

[37]“Salama Fikira Derby Marks 110 Years of Racing,” *Star* [Kenya], 14 Apr. 2015, https://www.the-star.co.ke/sasa/society/2015-04-14-salama-fikira-derby-marks-110-years-of-racing/ (accessed 8 Aug. 2019).

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gender equality, and even to attack the military institution itself. The recasting of private security work as colonial frontier soldiering forms part of a larger critique of Western states' interventions abroad. In effect, PMSCs are seen to be more conducive to an older and more successful colonial model of intervention based on a tradition of frontier soldiering rooted in the logic of settler-colonialism. As such, colonial fantasizing does more work than merely making precarity palatable. Fantasies of Anglo-Saxon global domination and especially of settler-colonialism were a central concern of liberal empire (Bell 2016). Private security work, recast as colonial adventurism, offers not simply a way to continue military life *as it was* but in fact entails the possibility to recapture the essence of how the military *should be.*

As we have seen, the backdrop to security work in East Africa is one marked by anxiety, frustration, and a sense of loss. Defeat in Iraq and Afghanistan, the shockwaves of the 2008 financial meltdown, and an increasingly polarized liberal democratic politics all contribute to a milieu in which the West appears to be increasingly fragile and reduced in global stature. Many contractors experienced first-hand the hubris of the 1990s giving way to mounting pessimism and uncertainty over the efficacy and unintended consequences of international intervention. Reading travelogues and engaging in other forms of colonial nostalgia help to address and explain the wider societal repercussions of military defeat in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as a broader perceived crisis of military masculinity.

It is well known that military veterans often have an ambiguous relationship to the state and the military (Bulmer and Eichler 2017), and that while soldiers are shaped by discipline and drill, they have historically also been agents of resistance and transgression (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000). It is perhaps not so surprising, then, that some contractors were fierce critics of the military system itself, especially its wastefulness and poor leadership, as well as political decisions that resulted in the wars they had to fight in. Take Simon, a British military veteran of the Iraq war and security contractor living in Kenya and working in Somalia: "Nobody in Somalia at the minute served in Oman in the sixties and early seventies. None of us in Somalia now served in the Indian army, [or] the Great Game."[38] In two sentences, Simon invokes the state-sanctioned covert deployment of British mercenaries to the de facto colony of Oman, the British imperial Indian army, and nineteenth-century inter-imperial rivalry between Britain and Russia.[39] This particular contractor had first served in Somalia as part of a British military contingent, before becoming disenchanted with what he perceived as the overly bureaucratic character and risk aversion of the military. He later returned to Somalia as a private security contractor. Now, he sardonically explained, "I'm a mercenary and they're not, because they're in a British uniform and a blue beret!"[40]

For Simon, contracting offers an alternative to the military apparatus, and colonial memory is mobilized to critique and explain these institutional differences. Others would invoke imperial histories to explain and critique the deeply unpopular wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that left many military personnel, whether they were mobilized as soldiers or contractors, disillusioned by and maligned in popular media narratives. It is now commonplace to characterize contemporary contractors in the Middle East

[38]Interview with Simon, 31 July 2017.

[39]The phrase "the Great Game" was also popularized by Rudyard Kipling.

[40]Interview with Simon, 31 July 2017.

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and elsewhere as immoral mercenaries and invoking the figure of the colonial frontier soldier offers an alternative identity (Percy 2007). Time and again, Simon contrasted the freedom he had as a contractor to the rigidity of the contemporary military through an excavation of his personal history, on one occasion recalling,

> a distant relative who was an officer in the Indian army serving with the Punjab Lancers. Grew a beard, wore a turban, ate local food, married a local girl, and if you see the photographs of him, you can't see the difference between him and his soldiers!… That's how we used to do it. Used to go in, you would embed yourself, you would learn the language, you would marry the local sultan's bride […] you would influence from within. What we're now doing [in the national military] is we now send out short term training teams who don't know the language don't understand the culture, don't understand the situation.[41]

Rather than being defined by market forces, Simon turned to his own family history to frame privatization as a choice that allowed him to return to the perceived freedom and superior influence of his military ancestors. As Cooper and Stoler, paraphrasing Joseph Schumpeter, acknowledge: "In the colonies conquest and command took pride of place over market and bureaucratic rationalities" (1997).

The aforementioned travelogues celebrate individual risk taking, often in the face of overbearing bureaucratic apparatuses lacking the stomach or vision for extraordinary and spectacular interventions overseas.[42] Take this Anglo-Irish security contractor comparing his role in East Africa to that of colonial agents, and mobilizing this as a critique of contemporary state intervention: "You know up until … the fifties or something like that, you had diplomats that would say I want to be in Arabia, because I want to become an Arabianist, or I wanna go to Asia because I like China, and they would learn the language and they would … know what the fuck they were talking about. Now they are all … going around in suits meeting people and having their photograph shown on Twitter and its … bollocks. We're losing!"[43] This historical narrative allows for production of an explanation for present-day precarity in which the military bureaucracy and larger political establishment are blamed for declining Western power and influence. A similar logic is reflected in the existential musings of another British military veteran of Iraq and current security contractor who, describing an "insipid and wet and febrile culture within government institutions who are now inappropriately risk averse," argues,

> [We] should not [have to] seek permission from fricking GCHQ to go on a two-hour trip! It's bonkers. We didn't run India that way, we didn't run Kenya that way in the early part of the twentieth century. Something has fundamentally changed, and it's not in the availability of people willing to do it. There are the same people who would chew their own arm off to get to Mogadishu and do their job, in the face of danger and hardship and we love it, as a nation, we love it. It's the system that's changed. And I don't think I should exist, or if I do

[41]Ibid.

[42]While Burton's expedition to explore the Somali interior had the tacit support of the British East India Company, the company refused to officially sponsor the venture, and it was made clear that Burton would be traveling as a "private" individual, in order to minimize potentially negative political fallout (Burton 2019).

[43]Ibid.

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exist…. I should just be part of that 1920s let's go somewhere fun and a little bit different and do what you've gotta do. It's what I love.[44]

The act of remembering is not simply anchored in past meaning, but also anticipates the future (Wydra 2018). Here, the contractor first unfavorably contrasts the present political-military establishment to an imagined colonial era counterpart, then invokes what he considers an essential and perennial British spirit of adventurism, before redressing his own role in nostalgic, colonial terms. He critiques the quality of contemporary military intervention by embedding it in a history of empire and presenting his privatized condition as more conducive to a model of colonial rule.

Colonial nostalgia also inserts itself into wider critiques around the perceived breakdown of traditional military roles, and even masculinity itself. European and American militaries, traditionally hypermasculine heteronormative institutions, are currently grappling with issues of liberal equality and the inclusion of more women (Stern and Strand 2022). In recent years the military has even become an unlikely site for feminists seeking demands for gender equality (Mesok 2016). For many contractors these changes and the larger societal shifts they are a part of were deleterious to their vision of social order and how the military should work. Men who grow up to be soldiers often first read about them in history books. Graham Dawson's *Soldier Heroes* (2013) explores the enduring importance of imperialist masculinities, demonstrating historical continuity through imperial heroes such as Lawrence of Arabia to modern conflicts such as the Falklands. Dawson ascribes particular importance to the role of fantasy in the shaping and imagining of imperialist masculinities, drawing attention to the systems of imagination, often inculcated in childhood, that precede encounters between colonizer and native. Burton, Hanley, and Ray were models of imperial masculinity, and from this angle, contemporary private security work is also a way of re-masculinizing the individual in the context of the perceived femininization of the military (see also Higate 2015).

"The Irish and the Somalis are so similar": Marketing and Organizing Security Work

The intersection of colonial and neoliberal thinking shapes the everyday business practices of security contractors, including by feeding into how they market themselves to clients and in organizing their work along racialized hierarchies. Take Bancroft, an American-registered and owned company that has been active in Somalia since 2007. Probably the most important PMSC in Somalia, Bancroft employs dozens of white mentors that hail from a number of different national and military backgrounds.[45] According to various respondents, Bancroft's unique selling point is that it hired contractors to be reflective of the multinational African Union peacekeeping force (AMISOM) that they were responsible for supporting. For

[44]Interview with Matt, 18 Sept. 2017 (my emphasis).

[45]The almost singular feature of all of Bancroft's "mentors," despite their divergent national military backgrounds, is that they have a Special Forces (SF) background. This is not unusual for PMSC contractors operating at the military-strategic level of the security industry but it has been spurred on by a huge expansion in the numbers of U.S. and UK Special Forces since Iraq and Afghanistan.

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example, South Africans were valued for their previous experience mentoring African soldiers in Angola (some of them with the infamous Executive Outcomes), French contractors worked predominantly with the Burundian contingent, where their language was an asset, while British contractors mainly "mentored" the Ugandan forces, a former colony.

Bancroft's multinational composition is testament to the transnational solidarity that military experience and the army's disciplinary powers can generate. The PMSC's colonial division of labor reveals how the market value of veterans is influenced by notions of colonial history that they themselves actively mobilize to help sell themselves in a global market. With contractors of European descent "mentoring" African soldiers drawn from their respective former colonies, Bancroft could be understood as a microcosm of a cosmopolitan imperialism in one PMSC. Moreover, colonial ideas about the division of force also inform contemporary approaches to mentoring and capacity building in terms of how security expertise was marketed on the basis of European soldierly identity. Contractors typically present themselves as knowledgeable European "mentors" while African troops are often characterized as corrupt, inefficient, or lazy. Speaking of his role in supporting peacekeepers in Somalia, one contractor remarked that "running a training camp is fine. But eventually someone's going to have to take these guys [peacekeepers] onto the street and hold their hand and show them what to do."[46]

Contractors also use colonial tropes to market themselves directly to clients. In Somalia, for example, knowledge of clans and sub-clans was considered a litmus test of professionalism: "I know so many people, I've got an in everywhere to every clan!" one contractor sardonically described to me.[47] Ethnographic descriptions produced by colonial military officers such as Burton in their travelogues formed the basis of this supposedly expert knowledge of the Other. Of course, these descriptions reproduce essentialist descriptions of Somali society, including through comparing Somalis to other historical colonial subjects. In a conversation with one contractor, he explained to me that Somalis were "mischievous, naughty, undisciplined, chaotic, but brilliant! Wonderful sense of humor, love them to bits. Bit like the Irish! The Irish and the Somalis are so similar! […] If you step back at them and look at their character, and the character of the nation, very similar. Clan-based, natural traders, great sense of humor, very chaotic in governance and full of mischief on every level."[48] The idea that Somalis were similar to the Irish was first coined by Richard Burton, who described African "Hibernians" as a "fierce and turbulent race of republicans" who "cannot be trusted without supervision."[49] That this trope persists today in the minds and marketing strategies of contemporary private security contractors is indicative of how the past reinscribes itself onto the present, in the process reproducing patterns of Othering and difference in the interest of capital accumulation.

Ideas of colonial difference also rested on notions of historical change that "imagined clear hierarchies of development, from the stage of primitive nomadism to that of high European culture" (Omissi 1994). Take this British contractor who,

[46]Interview with Brian, 1 Sept. 2017.

[47]Interview with Sean.

[48]Interview with Matt, 18 Sept. 2017 (my emphasis).

[49]Burton 2019, 127, 34.

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adopting a more explicit "white savior" role, rationalizes his decision to travel to East Africa for security work:

> I have to buy houses, and food, and look after my kids … so yeah of course I'm being paid to be here and do this, but the other way I look at it as well, is that I'm also out here as an enabler. So if you want a country that is literally like eleven hundred years behind where you came from in Manchester, in mental capability, they're immature, intellectually immature … [so] you want to bring in the Western world, with technological advancement, and all the rest of it … then you've got to be able to provide some sort of secure environment for normal people to come out here and do their shit."[50]

The cultural and linguistic knowledge that Europeans generated about their colonial subjects was both a product of the colonial encounter, and an aspect of continued imperial domination.[51] Everyday private security practices in places like Somalia uphold these notions of colonial difference and reify labor hierarchies between European contractors and African soldiers. In this sense colonial nostalgia in this context works to uphold "a logic of social organization that produces regimented, institutionalized, and militarized conceptions of hierarchized 'human' difference" (Rodriguez 2009: 11)—that is, white supremacy. Security contracting is therefore a condition of possibility for the reproduction of colonial whiteness. Colonial understandings of race function as an organizing principle for labor relations within the security industry, while whiteness is as an important marketing strategy for European contractors. As Stoler reminds us, "imperial nostalgia is not a postcolonial pleasure, but a concertedly colonial one, a mourning contingent on what colonialism has destroyed" (Stoler 2008).

Conclusion: Colonial Nostalgia and the Tensions of Modernity

This article has shown the multiple intersecting ways through which the colonial past is (re)inscribed into the present, in the process painting a complex picture of security contractors as both victims of precarity and participants in racial hierarchy and exploitation. For European security contractors, colonial nostalgia is rooted in the condition of present-day precarity. Unlike the "corporate soldiers" or globalized veterans in suits described in many accounts of private security, most of these men are not so much embracing neoliberal capitalism as trying to escape it. Accepting, experiencing, and reproducing market-driven precarity requires a significant and ongoing imaginative effort that also draws on a colonial past as a way to reclaim agency in the face of uncertainty. The figure of the colonial adventurer and frontier soldier, with its emphasis on freedom, individualism, and risk-taking, reifies neoliberal precarity by making it palatable, even desirable.

Colonial nostalgia also serves as a critique of Western statist intervention overseas, especially those unpopular wars in the Middle East that many contractors were themselves a part of. Here, PMSCs are imagined to embody a more successful colonial model of intervention based on a tradition of frontier soldiering rooted in the logic of settler-colonialism. Finally, fantasies and tropes of the colonial past inform the ways

[50]Interview with Neville, 1 Aug. 2017 (my emphasis).

[51]Omissi 1994, 29.

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in which contractors' market themselves and organize their activities in the present. In the process, this colonial imagining also reproduces racialized social orders and colonial whiteness.

To what extent are these nostalgic sentiments of (colonial) loss and yearning shaped by the specific struggles and concerns of contemporary security contractors in East Africa? While security contracting is undoubtedly a global phenomenon, security contractors work in historically and culturally specific *places*, and this specificity matters. It is true that this intersection between neoliberal precarity and colonial nostalgia may be heightened in East Africa because of the specific settler-colonial experience and the continued presence of a white Kenyan community. However, colonial nostalgia is a constitutive feature of Western modernity (Bissell 2005), and we have already seen how similar colonial and neoliberal intersections are also evident in Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, in Europe and America imperial yearning is a defining feature of the present, from Brexit to the War on Terror. As such, I suggest that the coloniality of modern security contracting may be witnessed elsewhere in the world, from Ukraine to Syria. Further research can explore the extent to which this colonial nostalgia is comparable to other "frontier" settings. What is clear is that any account of private security work should account for the multiple intersecting forms of privilege and precarity and the tensions that arise from them.

This relationship between the colonial past and the precarious present has several important political implications. First, it destabilizes linear temporalities of war and conflict, through which the past is bundled together in the present to shape contemporary and future action. Second, if we accept that empire and colonial nostalgia are significant for the making and sustaining of contemporary neoliberal precarity and racialized hierarchies of violence, then countering hierarchy and exclusion in the present means addressing both contemporary precarity and reckoning with the colonial past simultaneously. Finally, this article has pleaded for a more nuanced picture of a much maligned and stereotyped character: the private military and security contractor. It shows how these individuals are both elite and precarious, victims and perpetrators, excluded and exclusionary. Specifically, we should pay greater attention not only to race, but also to class, as an organizing principle in global private security contracting. Colonial nostalgia is not a dormant remembering, but a central, living feature of modern security contracting that emerges out of these tensions and is implicated in ongoing cycles of violence, precarity, and exclusion.

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