

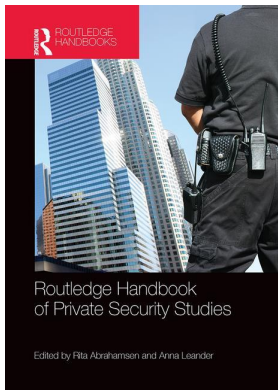
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Rita Abrahamsen, Anna Leander

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## 4

# COMPANY SOVEREIGNS, PRIVATE VIOLENCE AND COLONIALISM

*Andrew Phillips*

This chapter analyses the central role company sovereigns – the most important practitioners of non-state violence during the colonial era – played in driving Western colonial expansion. The chapter begins with a conceptual overview that problematizes the dichotomy between public and private violence, introduces company sovereigns, and distinguishes them from other forms of state and non-state colonial violence. I then define company sovereigns more comprehensively, and trace their evolution from the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries. This encompasses their initial role as pioneers of European imperialism in Africa, Asia and the Americas; their revival during the ‘new imperialism’ of the late nineteenth century; and their delegitimation and abolition in the twentieth century. The final section argues not only that international relations scholars should acknowledge company sovereigns as much as sovereign states as the true vanguards of the spread of a European-dominated global colonial order, but also that their role is crucial to contextualize and comprehend the contemporary re-emergence of private international violence.

### **Non-state violence: an essential feature of European colonialism**

In situating private violence within the context of European colonial expansion, three framing observations are required. First, the contemporary distinction between public and private violence is socially constructed, and emerged only recently in historical terms (Owens 2008). Before the late eighteenth century, when Europeans began to imagine the economy as a discrete sphere of interaction distinct from other forms of social activity, they generally did not see violence as the sovereign state’s exclusive preserve. Instead, rulers typically shared quintessentially sovereign prerogatives, including the rights to wage war and violently enforce laws, with numerous non-state actors. Before the 1800s, rulers generally lacked the desire or the capacity to pursue a monopoly over legitimate violence. Instead, they authorized non-state actors to use force for various purposes, from tax collection through to law enforcement and – most importantly for present purposes – overseas territorial expansion (Allen 2011: 191–2).

Second, what little coercive power European sovereigns did enjoy dissipated rapidly over distance (Roper and van Ruymbeke 2007: 4). This ensured that non-state violence featured especially prominently in European efforts to project power into the Americas, Asia and Africa. Before the annihilation of distance that nineteenth century advances in transportation and

communication wrought, Europeans faced formidable logistical challenges advancing their overseas colonial ambitions (Headrick 2012: 8). In part, they overcame the tyranny of distance by delegating sovereign powers to wage war, make laws and pursue diplomacy to non-state actors. Thus, '[t]he exercise of sovereignty was extended by dividing it' (Halliday 2013: 269). Entities such as the English and Dutch East India Companies enabled Europeans to pursue wealth and power at trans-continental distances by investing quasi-autonomous corporations with extensive powers of government overseas. Not all European states expanded through the use of company sovereigns. But the practice was sufficiently conspicuous among leading colonial powers to warrant foregrounding company sovereigns as central actors.

Third, the violence – both state and non-state – that attended European colonial expansion took a bewildering variety of forms. To make this discussion manageable, I classify forms of colonial violence within a  $2 \times 2$  taxonomy that builds on Stephen Krasner's distinction between authority and control as aspects of sovereign power (Krasner 1999: 4–6). At one end of the continuum, we find sovereign statist forms of violence, where sovereign states both authorized violence and directly controlled the means through it was exercised. An example would be the Portuguese Estado da Índia's use of naval violence to establish the king of Portugal's claims to maritime hegemony in the early modern Indian Ocean. At the other end of the continuum, we find forms of violence that sovereign states neither authorized nor controlled, but that also attended Western expansion, including pirates, bandits and adventurers, who used violence for purely private gain, or to pressure Western governments to extend their authority into new territories.

At the mid-point of the continuum, we find two further forms of violence – non-state authorized and state controlled, and state-authorized and non-state controlled. Non-state-authorized but state-controlled forms of violence were extremely rare – perhaps the only notable example would be the English East India Company's co-opting of royal naval resources to fend off French predation in the Indian Ocean in the mid-eighteenth century (Marshall 1980: 25). Conversely, state authorized but non-state controlled violence was a central feature of European expansion. Indeed, this chapter's central claim is that company sovereigns from the 1600s to the 1900s served as one of the principal vanguards of European conquest in the Americas, Africa and Asia. Accordingly, the following discussion first defines company sovereigns, before tracking their historical evolution and reflecting on their contemporary legacies for world politics.

### **Company sovereigns as vanguard agents of European imperialism**

Company sovereigns constituted hybrid polity forms, which combined governance functions characteristic of the sovereign state with the profit-maximizing motivations of the private corporation:

[Company sovereigns] did what early modern governments did: erect and administer law; collect taxes; provide protection; inflict punishment; perform stateliness; regulate economic, religious, and civil life; conduct diplomacy and wage war; make claims to jurisdiction over land and sea; cultivate authority over and obedience from those people subject to [their] command.

*(Stern 2011: 3–4)*

They derived their power from revocable charters granted to them either by kings or parliaments, and so theoretically remained subordinate to their home states. But in practice, they operated so far from Europe as to enjoy virtually free rein in their colonizing efforts. Likewise,

company sovereigns retained international legal personalities distinct from their home states, being able to conclude treaties with foreign powers without the imprimatur of rulers back in Europe.

Their governmental prerogatives notwithstanding, it was profit – not power – that primarily motivated the company sovereigns' creation and expansion. Thus, the English East India Company (hereafter the EIC) was set up in 1600 to maximize merchants' profits from trade with Asia. It did so by pooling their capital in a single organization, and then investing this organization with a royally guaranteed monopoly to manage England's Asian trade (Stern 2011: 10). Likewise, company sovereigns and 'private' proprietors led European expansion in the Americas, with profit-seeking proprietors charged with recruiting settlers, purchasing and transporting slaves, and establishing and managing plantations to produce commodities (especially sugar and cotton) for sale in Europe (Hsueh 2010: 1).

The enormous distances separating Europe from the rest of the world in the pre-industrial era made colonialism extremely expensive and risky. For cash-strapped European governments still struggling to consolidate power at home, company sovereigns provided a cheap means of mobilizing the money and initiative of powerful subjects to advance imperial ends. The global expansion of trade after 1500, following the European 'discovery' of the Americas and the opening of a direct maritime trading route to Asia, made trans-continental imperialism potentially extremely profitable. Medieval European traditions of delegating governmental powers to local elites to subdue Europe's 'internal frontiers' meanwhile provided a precedent for outsourcing early modern imperialism to company sovereigns (Lloyd and Metzger 2013: 13). The resulting intersection of opportunity with precedent provided the context for company sovereigns' emergence as imperialism's violent vanguards from the seventeenth century onwards.

### **Company sovereigns in the Americas, Africa and Asia from 1500 to 1750**

European colonial violence in the early modern period centred primarily on three onslaughts respectively directed at the Americas, Africa and Asia. In the Americas, Europeans dispossessed and exterminated large sections of the indigenous population, and laid claim to the New World's vast reserves of land and precious metals. In Africa, they established the transatlantic slave trade, which saw close to ten million African slaves forcibly transported to the Americas and other parts of the Atlantic basin from 1450 to 1867 (Lovejoy 1982: 477). In the Indian Ocean and East Asia, they gate-crashed vast trading networks stretching from Zanzibar to Nagasaki. Company sovereigns were integrally involved in spearheading each prong of this triple assault on the non-European world.

European colonialism in the Americas assumed various forms, consonant with the different traditions and resources of the primary colonial powers, the English, Dutch, French, Spanish and Portuguese. These variations notwithstanding, most of these powers resorted to forms of proprietary colonization, involving company sovereigns and other forms of chartered authority (Tomlins 2001: 316). For the Atlantic powers, distance was the problem and delegation the solution in conquering the New World:

Encomenderos in New Spain, patroons in New Netherland, Brazilian donatory captains, and various seigneurs and companies in the French Empire ... exercised local authority by virtue of grants, customarily of lands, that incorporated responsibility for maintaining order at some level just as aristocrats and lower landholding orders did in Western Europe.

*(Roper and van Ruymbeke 2007: 7)*

Admittedly, the Iberian powers tried to keep sub-rulers in the Americas tightly reined under the yoke of royal authority. Conversely, both the English and the Dutch relied extensively on company sovereigns to spearhead American colonization. The Hudson Bay Company (the HBC) and the Dutch West India Company (WIC) both played crucial roles in advancing these polities' interests in the Americas. At one time the largest landowner in the world, governing a territory encompassing 'nearly three million square miles – ten times the size of the Holy Roman Empire at its height' (Newman 2000: 4), the HBC also effectively controlled the highly lucrative fur trade throughout much of British North America from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. Less successful in the scale of its conquests, the WIC critically aided Dutch settlement of the Americas. The WIC was also heavily involved in facilitating the trade of another key commodity of the Atlantic plantation economy – African slaves (Postma 1990: 16–17).

Having ravaged and reduced the indigenous Amerindian population, European invaders turned to African slaves to feed labour-intensive agricultural industries, most notably sugar and cotton production. Company sovereigns again played key roles in sustaining this process. Company sovereigns initiated diplomatic relations with African rulers, established fortified trading networks along the African coast, and maintained vast merchant fleets to transport slaves to New World plantations. Prior to the nineteenth century, a combination of diseases and indigenous martial prowess generally kept Europeans confined to the African coast (Cooney 1980: 158). Consequently, company sovereigns relied on African rulers as 'wholesalers' to supply the slaves that company agents then exported. In the long term, the costs of maintaining fortress networks in Africa helped bankrupt the WIC and its English counterpart, the Royal African Company, and more improvised and nimble private consortia emerged to fill the resulting vacuum (Carlos and Kruse 1996: 294). This caveat aside, in the seventeenth century in particular, company sovereigns played a pioneering role in forging the transatlantic slave economy.

Finally, company sovereigns were central players in opening up Asian markets to European commerce in the seventeenth through to the nineteenth centuries. Preceded by the more classically statist Portuguese Estado da India, company sovereigns such as the Dutch and English East India Companies helped facilitate a twenty-five-fold increase in maritime trade between Europe and Asia from 1500 to 1800 (de Vries 2010: 718). Company sovereigns at times inflicted near-genocidal levels of violence on local populations to secure their commercial objectives. Thus, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) exterminated the native population of the Spice Islands (located in what is now Indonesia) in the 1620s and repopulated them with slaves in an effort to monopolize global production of cloves, mace and nutmeg, spices worth more than their weight in gold (Adams 1996: 18). More commonly, though, company sovereigns were supplicants rather than suzerains in Asia. From Mughal India to Qing China and Japan, the company sovereigns typically maintained networks of trading 'factories' under local rulers' sufferance, and from a position of military inferiority. This changed only from the mid-eighteenth century, when the English East India Company abandoned its earlier aversion to territorial aggrandizement, and embarked on a haphazard series of conquests that had by 1849 won it near-total hegemony on the Indian sub-continent. By this time, however, Europeans were beginning to question the legitimacy and utility of company sovereigns, potentially condemning them to terminal decline (Stern 2008: 283).

### **The decline, revival and abolition of company sovereigns, 1750–1950**

Whether aiding in the conquest of the Americas, mediating the transatlantic slave trade or elbowing their way into Asian palaces and bazaars, company sovereigns played a crucial role in

leading early modern Western colonial expansion. From the mid-eighteenth century, however, intellectual shifts in Europe and accelerating global military competition together seemed set to condemn company sovereigns to oblivion. Intellectually, Europeans increasingly reconceived the economy as a realm separate and distinct from other spheres of social life. In the English-speaking world in particular, this shift saw liberals such as Adam Smith challenge company sovereigns' monopolistic privileges as antithetical to the merits of free-market economics (Jones and Ville 1996: 898). Conservatives meanwhile attacked company sovereigns from a different vantage point. Scandalized by the East India Company's conquest of Bengal in the 1760s, Edmund Burke bemoaned the threat to both English and Indian liberty that the Company's unprecedented accumulation of power in the sub-continent supposedly represented (Dirks 2009). Reflecting different ideological standpoints, these critiques converged in their hostility to company sovereigns' retention of governmental prerogatives.

This shifting intellectual climate corresponded with a global acceleration of military competition, which also augured ill for the company sovereigns. From the Seven Years' War onwards (1756–63), European inter-state rivalries intensified and globalized. For the company sovereigns, this exacerbated an inner tension between their driving motives of profit and power, which they had long struggled to reconcile. In Asia in particular, company sovereigns had generally avoided large-scale conquest, for fear that the overheads of governing large indigenous populations would corrode any profits they might otherwise yield from their trading operations. The heightened competition of the late eighteenth century nevertheless pushed company sovereigns towards ever-greater reliance on territorial expansion and the taxation of local populations. These expedients, frequently driven by the rapacity of local company agents, proved financially ruinous in the long run. They also began to change the company sovereigns' very nature, as conquest and government eclipsed trade and profit as their primary purposes.

By the end of the Napoleonic Wars (1815), most of the company sovereigns were either bankrupt or subject to much tighter state supervision, consistent with their newly dominant function as governors rather than traders (Stern 2008: 283). This trend continued over the nineteenth century, as the sovereign state's dominance over alternative polity forms grew apace. In 1857, the 'Indian mutiny' saw the British Raj nearly toppled. Following this near-fatal crisis, the British Crown assumed direct responsibility from the EIC for governing its vast Asian empire. In North America, meanwhile, the Deed of Surrender saw the HBC yield the vast bulk of its territory to the British Crown (which in turn transferred it to the newly formed Canadian Confederacy) in 1869–70 (Newman 2000: 575).

From the Hudson Bay to south Asia, company sovereigns appeared fated to extinction by the mid-nineteenth century. Had this proved to be the case, they could perhaps be written off as an exotic footnote to the story of European imperial expansion, institutional hybrids that were dismantled once sovereign states marshalled the capacity to directly fund and administer trans-continental colonization. But company sovereigns proved far more resilient and adaptive than such a linear narrative would suggest.

The last third of the nineteenth century saw a surge in global interconnectedness, propelled by revolutionary advances in communication and transportation technologies, most notably the telegraph, the steamship and the railway. This growth in interconnectedness coincided after 1873 with a prolonged global economic depression, and a further intensification of imperial rivalries. This competition was particularly pronounced in sub-Saharan Africa, mainland south-east Asia and the Pacific, and it was in these regions that company sovereigns re-emerged to assert their home states' colonial interests.

Company sovereigns revived after the 1870s as a familiar means for countries to extend imperial influence while supposedly deflecting the costs and risks of colonial expansion to



private actors. In practice, the rebooted chartered companies were more tethered to home governments than their early modern antecedents. Moreover, hopes that they would relieve governments of the financial risks and costs of imperialism proved forlorn, with taxpayers typically having to bail out ill-conceived and profit-less colonial adventures (Reno 2004: 613). Nevertheless, nineteenth-century company sovereigns proved at least as rapacious and no less violent than their forebears. This is most evident in the depredations of the Congo Free State, perhaps history's most notorious expression of private colonial violence.

The Congo Free State (today's Democratic Republic of the Congo) encompassed a territory in Central Africa approximately the size of western Europe, which Belgian King Leopold II ruled as his private fiefdom from 1885 to 1908. Exports of rubber and ivory, harvested by an enslaved local workforce, formed the foundation of the Congo Free State's economy. Notorious for its brutality, the Congo Free State presided over the death of up to ten million Africans (Weisbord 2003: 6). The regime's violence ultimately sparked an international campaign, provoking such popular outrage that Leopold was eventually forced to transfer sovereignty over the Congo Free State to the Belgian government (*ibid.*: 35).

Beyond its singular savagery, the Congo Free State merits attention to illustrate how unremarkable private colonialism was well into the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Besides the Congo Free State, the German East Africa Company and the British South Africa Company respectively spearheaded German and British imperialism throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa, the latter administering what is now Zimbabwe until 1924. Likewise, Portugal's Mozambique Company (established in 1892) ruled much of Mozambique until 1942, when Lisbon asserted direct authority over the territories it had formerly ruled. Elsewhere, the British North Borneo Company administered North Borneo (now the Malaysian state of Sabah) until 1946, when the territory briefly became a Crown colony prior to Malaysian independence in 1957.

Private colonial violence thus formed a common feature of international politics until the mid-twentieth century. No single international scandal matching the revelation of the Congo Free State's atrocities ever emerged to delegitimize the chartered companies wholesale as a model of political and economic organization. Instead, they died a slow death, being incrementally liquidated for both functional and normative reasons.

Functionally, chartered companies proved brutal and ineffectual as colonial administrators. Low levels of capitalization meant that most lacked the resources to invest in the infrastructure needed to effectively administer their territories. Instead, they relied on short-term coercive measures (most notably corvée labour systems) to exploit their colonies' natural resources. This set a pattern of weak and predatory governance that would persist into the post-colonial era (Vail 1976: 389). Likewise, the chartered companies failed to contain European colonial rivalries. Advocates conceived chartered companies as a cheap means of asserting metropolitan governments' strategic and commercial interests without directly investing governments' interests or prestige (Reno 2004: 608). In practice, however, they rarely contained diplomatic or military rivalries, but instead often required political, financial and even military rescue from their government patrons (Vail 1976: 416).

Normatively, it would be anachronistic to credit the chartered companies' demise to the decolonization movement, which gained global momentum after 1945, as the last company sovereigns were being wound up. Even before then, Western governments were increasingly tying the legitimacy of colonial rule to notions of trusteeship and economic development (Bain 2003: 113). In this light, chartered companies' well-publicized failures to advance their subjects' welfare contributed significantly to their delegitimation. As Western governments embraced more expansive programmes of social reform, both at home but also in the colonies, the idea of delegating rule to profit-driven companies correspondingly lost favour. By the mid-twentieth

century, chartered companies' past governance failures, combined with their increasing incongruence with established norms of development and nascent norms of decolonization, at last condemned them to oblivion.

### **The company sovereigns: theoretical relevance and contemporary legacies**

The above survey demonstrates company sovereigns' centrality as agents of European colonialism. The sheer scale of the company sovereigns' violence merits greater attention within international relations (IR), a discipline that aims to understand, address (and, ideally, redress) the problem of violence in global politics. Beyond this broad exhortation, a greater focus on the company sovereigns promises three more concrete pay-offs.

First, a greater focus on company sovereigns promises to yield a better understanding of the international system's origins and expansion. Writing of western Europe's transition from medieval heteronomy to sovereign anarchy, Ruggie has observed: 'The chief characteristic of the modern system of territorial rule is the consolidation of all parcelized and personalized authority into one public realm. This consolidation entailed two fundamental spatial demarcations: between public and private realms and between internal and external realms' (Ruggie 1993: 151). Although Ruggie stresses the protracted nature of this dual demarcation, his analysis supports a conventional Westphalian narrative of the modern international system's origins. Through this narrative, various 'monopoly mechanisms' (Stinchcombe 1998: 267) squeezed out competitors to the sovereign state, first within Europe, and then throughout the wider world. Key to this process was the state's monopolization of coercion within tightly delimited territorial boundaries, and its concomitant disarmament of non-state actors. Violence through this process became a prerogative of public power, increasingly invested exclusively in the sovereign state.

Conversely, if we bring the company-state back into our analyses of the international system's evolution, we can discern a more crooked and elongated path to sovereign-territorial modernity. Rather than seeing the medieval-to-modern transition as an ever-narrowing funnel, in which competitive pressures weeded out alternatives to the sovereign state, we see instead the reconfiguration of medieval forms and practices, and their adaptation to the post-1500 challenges of trans-continental colonization. Far from being peculiar to medieval Europe, heteronomous (i.e. territorially non-exclusive) non-state polity forms thrived over the course of early modern Western colonial expansion. Indeed, at the very moment that some non-state polity forms (e.g. city-states and city-leagues) were vanishing from Europe, others (pre-eminently the company sovereigns) were emerging to take the lead in projecting Western power into the non-European world (Curtin 1984: 4).

Acknowledging this reality reinforces and enriches an established revisionism, which has challenged the Peace of Westphalia as signifying an epochal rupture demarcating the medieval from the modern eras (Teschke 2003; Osiander 2007; Nexon 2009). More fundamentally, it also helps destabilize the dual demarcations (inside/outside, public/private) that are routinely seen as underpinning modern political life. While drawing on medieval precedents of chartered authority, company sovereigns were emphatically modern institutions, combining features of the sovereign state and the limited liability corporation. But their very hybridity also meant that they transgressed the inside/outside and public/private dichotomies we conventionally associate with modernity. Especially in pre-colonial Asia, company sovereigns won locals' grudging acceptance precisely because of their willingness to share sovereign prerogatives with host communities within limited commercial enclaves (Phillips and Sharman 2015). Likewise, though dedicated mainly to profit (a quintessentially 'private' motive), company sovereigns were



also public entities, exercising powers of war and law-making commonly identified with sovereign states. In their very constitution, they confounded notions of territorial exclusivity and the compartmentalization of power into distinct public and private spheres. Recognition of this reality promises to expand our awareness of the diverse polity forms that populated the early modern world, and remind us of the prevalence of heterogeneity over sovereign-territorial homogeneity as a hallmark of the age of European expansion.

Second, a greater focus on the company sovereigns compels us to acknowledge their pioneering role alongside sovereign states as agents of European expansion. Too often, our conception of the dynamics of European conquest remains hostage to a state-centric 'vanguardist' vision of history (Buzan 2010: 2). Through this optic, the sovereign state – the supposed exemplar of European modernity – formed the primary agent through which Westerners forced themselves on non-European societies. Many scholars adhering to this narrative have attributed the 'rise of the West' to the centripetal consequences of the early modern 'military revolution' (McNeill 1982; Parker 1996). Through this reading, a combination of military-technological innovation and bureaucratic-administrative centralization yielded precociously powerful 'national states' (Tilly 1992: 5–6). These national states equipped Europeans with the institutional wherewithal to then conquer large sections of the non-European world.

This narrative struggles to accommodate the pivotal role company sovereigns, as relatively decentralized networked polities, played in driving European expansion. Far from developing as a contrivance of kings, the early company sovereigns more often emerged at the initiative of powerful subjects, who sought rulers' imprimatur to pursue profit-oriented colonial enterprises. The 'empire of civil society' (Rosenberg 1994), rather than rulers themselves, frequently took the lead in planting colonies overseas. Likewise, as successors to medieval forms of chartered authority, company sovereigns embodied not the Hobbesian centralism of the ideal-typical sovereign state, but testified to the immense power of dispersed and delegated forms of authority as instruments of imperial expansion.

Finally, a greater understanding of the company sovereigns' nature and history helps us to better comprehend the contemporary resurgence of 'private' international violence. The operations of private security actors in Africa, particularly with regard to securing resource enclaves in weak states, have led some to draw parallels between this practice and the activities of nineteenth century chartered company sovereigns (Reno 2004). Such parallels are useful to the extent that they rescue us from the historical amnesia that characterizes state-centric studies of global politics. But they can be dangerous to the extent that they foster the 'back to the future' fallacy, that today's private security actors somehow form linear descendants to yesterday's company sovereigns.

The early modern company sovereigns, their nineteenth and twentieth century successors, and today's private security actors undeniably share important features. All combine profit seeking with either possession of direct coercive power, the execution of security prerogatives traditionally associated with sovereign states, or some combination of the two. Nevertheless, each emerged at distinct historical junctures, distinguished by contingent conceptions of sovereignty and equally idiosyncratic conceptions of the public/private divide. Emerging at a time when Europe was still shedding its heteronomous medieval inheritance, early company sovereigns embodied a conception of sovereignty as divisible and capable of delegation to actors that only later generations would conceive as 'private' in character. Conversely, the chartered companies arose during the age of the 'new imperialism', when modern ideas of sovereignty were more clearly formed and public/private distinctions more sharply delineated. The existence of a highly stratified international order, that abridged or withheld sovereign rights from

many non-European societies, nevertheless left space for the resurgence and re-articulation of forms of company sovereignty to stabilize the international system's 'turbulent frontiers' (Reno 2004: 613). Finally, today's private security actors operate within partially de-territorialized 'global security assemblages' (Abrahamsen and Williams 2011: 3), where norms of sovereign statehood have been universalized, and the arrogation of sovereign powers to corporate actors has been correspondingly limited. At the same time, a combination of neoliberal economic ideals, state weakness in the developing world, and a growing enthusiasm for public-private partnerships has created a niche for private actors to supplement rather than supplant indigenous sovereign power in the provision of security services.

My point is not to suggest that a neat institutional genealogy can be traced linking the English East India Company to today's global private security providers. Rather, I have sought to demonstrate the historic centrality of company sovereigns to the colonial experience, and to illustrate how foregrounding company sovereigns more prominently in our analyses allows us to lay bare the historically varied and contested constitutive divisions – between inside and outside and between public and private – that help make up international systems. Pursuing such an enterprise not only enables us to better understand the modern international system's evolution; it also helps us to better contextualize and comprehend the significance of private international violence as an enduring feature of contemporary global politics.

### Note

- 1 I classify the Congo Free State as an example of private colonialism because King Leopold II ruled it as his own private property, separate and distinct from his position as the public sovereign and head of state. In this respect, it was comparable to other forms of proprietary colonialism.

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