

The case of Colombia

# **THE BECOMING OF COAL MINING AND THE SECURITY AROUND IT**

Line Jespersgaard Jakobsen

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### **Line Jespersgaard Jakobsen**

PhD Candidate

Ljja@diis.dk

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DIIS · Danish Institute for International Studies

Østbanegade 117, DK-2100 Copenhagen, Denmark

Tel: +45 32 69 87 87

E-mail: [diis@diis.dk](mailto:diis@diis.dk)

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Initiating the coal project: the civilization quest</b>	<b>3</b>
The construction of the infrastructure as engines of progress	8
<b>Land acquisition strategies: the early version of corporate security practices</b>	<b>11</b>
Land for infrastructure: invading by creating kinship	12
Negotiations of power, acts of resistance and the engineering of consent	15
Land for the mine: evictions and resettlements	16
<b>The becoming of corporate security: Reversing security logics</b>	<b>19</b>
Strengthened security and reputational pressure: paramilitary ties	22
Private security and surveillance: the glue between the dots	23
<b>Towards corporate security today</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>29</b>

## INTRODUCTION

Large mining corporations play a huge role in development today as actors that produce energy for the global market and use and pollute land and resources, as well as taking part in charity work among some of the world's poorest in marginal areas. The corporate-led extractive sector has undergone a crucial transformation, from being dominated by securitized mining enclaves (Ferguson 2005; Le Billon 2001; Peluso and Watts 2001) to becoming highly influential in governance (Guáqueta 2013), development (Bruno and Karliner 2002; Himley 2010; Welker 2014; Rajak 2011) and privatized security (Abrahamsen and Williams 2017; Hönke 2014). This paper narrows in on the topic through an ethnographic exploration of the specific corporate practices that construct and secure an industrial mining operation.

The operation in question in this study is *Carbones de Cerrejón*, a large-scale open-pit coal mine in northern Colombia, which represents the world's fourth largest provider of coal to the global market (Oei and Mendelevitch 2019). Being largely empirical, this historical ethnography of the becoming<sup>1</sup> of Cerrejón explores how multiple expressions of corporate security has played a part in the firm's activities from the early construction of mining infrastructure in the 1980s to the more recent resettlements of communities in the 2000s. 'Corporate security practices' is the umbrella term for both hard and soft technologies used to build relations with local communities, maintain and improve stability around the firm's operations and secure investments from interruptions such as local unrest and blockades.

This paper demonstrates that contemporary corporate security practices around mining operations build on past legacies of kinship-making and colonial quests for civilization that interact in a messy alignment with a mixture of corporate patronage and emerging neoliberal models of sustainable development. The fundamental argument of the paper is that, while corporate dynamics have undergone huge transformations from the 1980s until today, hard and soft technologies for securing the corporation have always gone hand in hand. In addition, the paper argues that corporate security practices are ever-changing, meaning that hard technologies are, at some moments and in some circumstances, to the fore, while the softer practices work on the periphery, though the balance

<sup>1</sup> Inspired by Deleuze, the use of 'becoming' instead of 'history' in the title is an attempt to avoid reproducing historicism's power of domination and instead show how events also co-create events. Becoming, according to Deleuze, corresponds to a productive force for change, whereas history is "one with the triumph of States" (Deleuze 1989 in Lundy 2012:4). Graig Lundy (2012:4) interprets Deleuze as stating that becoming creates, whereas history captures and represents what is created. It is also made clear, however, that Deleuze is not disregarding history, but rather warning against obeying standard ontologies of cause and effect and teleological historicism, advocating a constant movement between history and becoming (ibid.). This article attempts to articulate this by tracing how the becoming of coal-mining is also the becoming of (a transformation of) extractive corporate security practices.

can shift at other moments or in other circumstances. The paper shows how hard and soft practices have changed over time, but also that the soft practices, even when strategically placed on the periphery, have and continue to have the ability to normalize the use of force in both time and space. In its historical exploration of the dynamics involved here, the paper also provides some insights into how the indigenous population of La Guajira has reacted to the arrival of the mine and the company's evolving power over their lives.

The paper starts by showing how land was freed up to build the mining complex and its infrastructure and describing how the emergence of a large company with increasingly modern technology brought a specific (colonial) mindset to a population and a natural environment that was perceived 'wild and untamed' in order to prepare both land and people for this large mining complex. In the last part of the paper, the becoming of Cerrejón will be related to the becoming of strategic corporate security arrangements, which, since being designed in 1996, have now been turned on their head in terms of strategic priorities. This part of the paper builds on written historical accounts and my own interviews and reflects two often opposed versions of history: the corporate perspective and the perspective of the affected populations.

## **INITIATING THE COAL PROJECT: THE CIVILIZATION QUEST**

Coal was discovered in La Guajira in the mid-nineteenth century, but the history of the Cerrejón corporation does not begin until 1975, when the Colombian government issued a tender to international companies to mine coal in an area of 32,000 hectares in La Guajira. The International Colombian Resources Corporation (INTERCOR) won the bid, most likely because its offer of royalties was double that of the company that came second (Acosta 2012:40). The following year INTERCOR as the contractor entered into a collaborative agreement with *Carbones Colombianos* S.A. (Carbocol) to explore the area called Cerrejón Zona Norte in a contract lasting for 33 years (that is, until 2009) (Cerrejón n.d.). Carbocol was a state-owned company created that same year, most likely for this specific purpose, while INTERCOR, the other owner, was a subsidiary of the Exxon Corporation (now ExxonMobil).<sup>2</sup> The contract they signed was divided into three phases: exploration (1977–1980), construction (1981–1986) and production (1986–2009). In January 1999, the Colombian government extended the concession for a further 25 years, to 2034, which is the time period valid today (Cerrejón n.d.).

When the initial phase of exploration began in January 1977, the first employees came to La Guajira from elsewhere in shifts of fifteen people and stayed in a camp

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<sup>2</sup> Foreign governments and corporations supported the project financially: different types of loans were issued by the US export-import bank and Canada's Export Development Bank, mostly for purchases of US and Canadian mining equipment in the early 1980s. The total of these loans was more than two billion US dollars (Aviva Chomsky in Ramírez Cuellar 2005).

for durations of three weeks. Those who were sent to explore La Guajira were transported from Bogotá (around 1000 km from La Guajira) in a small airplane that traveled once a week between the capital and the 'Tabaco pioneer camp' (Acosta 2012). The camp, built where the first pit was supposed to be (Tabaco), came to be populated by people from different regions of Colombia. As the former journalist and employee of radio Cerrejón John Acosta writes, 'here began to take shape what is today proudly considered among themselves: the great family of Cerrejón' (Acosta 2012:3). Tabaco is also the name of the Afro-Colombian community that was forcefully evicted in 2001, of which Acosta's account makes no mention whatsoever. According to a displaced resident of Tabaco, the employees of the camp '(...) knew how everyone was thinking and acting, because they lived inside the communities' (Vásquez et al. 2015:156). This facilitated 'a quick privatization of the territory' (ibid.), as the memory book, *Barbaros Hoscos*, co-written by representatives of the displaced communities, concludes.

The 'pioneers' in the late 1970s described La Guajira as a semi-desert land with 'an exotic beauty' (Acosta 2012:3), but also as a place of superstitions and mysteries, with a hostile nature. This excerpt from Acosta's almost lyrical story-writing gives an impression of the self-image of the first members of this great 'Cerrejón family':<sup>3</sup>

On the dark starry nights or under the light of a radiant moon, they saw smuggling of cattle to Venezuela wrapped in the mournful mooing of the cows, donkeys and cars loaded with marijuana [that was] also smuggled. It was La Guajira 'brava',<sup>4</sup> untamed, without law, without progress and without anything: only the ephemeral happiness of debauchery. 'We will turn this into a legal and developed region based on coal,' said the inhabitants of the camp (ibid.).

Not only does this passage portray the self-image of these 'pioneers', it also reflects a broader civilizing mission with similarities with the missions of colonial projects (see, for instance, Fischer-Tiné and Mann 2004; Beirne and South 2007). The perception about land and property in La Guajira was that the land was a vast stretch of wasteland. In the Environmental Impact Statement and Social Impact Statement that were prepared for the mining project (supposedly a very large publication in six volumes<sup>5</sup>), the indigenous population is hardly taken into account at all. In 1991 the anthropologist Weilder Guerra Curvelo wrote that the report was delivered in February 1982,<sup>6</sup> after the road had been built and many Wayúu families had already been displaced.<sup>7</sup> According to the anthropologist

<sup>3</sup> Which back then was 'the Intercor family' (Girado Caballero 1998:30).

<sup>4</sup> 'Brava' is Spanish for 'wild, furious, savage, dauntless'.

<sup>5</sup> I have not been able to access it myself.

<sup>6</sup> March, according to Acosta (2012:41).

<sup>7</sup> The company that had been contracted to do the impact study, Integral Ltda., admitted that the study did not mention any socio-cultural characteristics of the northern Guajira Wayúu population,

Deborah Pacini, who did fieldwork in La Guajira in 1983, Wayúu culture was completely dismissed in the study and the population reduced to Uribia, which was considered ‘a small indigenous community with a primitive infrastructure’ (Pacini 1983 quoting impact study in Chomsky, Leech, and Striffler 2007:40).<sup>8</sup> When Intercor and Carbocol arrived in the region to do the first explorations, the ‘natural owners’ of the properties (Acosta 2012:3), the indigenous or non-indigenous farmers inhabiting the land whom they encountered, did not have formal title deeds. They were only de-facto entitled to the land because they had cultivated it for many years (Vásquez et al. 2015). As they did not have formal titles, however, and the authorities began to see the potential for profit, so the untitled lands were formally declared baldíos (empty land) and granted to the mine (A. Chomsky in Ramírez Cuellar 2005 p. 14). A Cerrejón foundation publication from 2009 admits that the perception that these lands were baldíos was not correct:

The land for the railway line was initially considered wasteland, without assuming that it had been occupied by Guajira’s natives since before the arrival of the Europeans, and since before the formation of the Colombian state in the nineteenth century. Although the population density at that time was low, it was by no means land without an owner (Fundación Cerrejón Guajira Indígena 2009:5).

Acosta’s narrative indicates what several older guajiros<sup>9</sup> told me during fieldwork: according to this colonial ‘pioneer’-like perception, indigenous land was just waiting for settlers to cultivate it and turn it into productive zones, formalizing and legalizing what was seen as ungoverned and lawless, and recalling Hernando de Soto’s (2001) dream of making ‘dead capital’ live by formalizing property rights. To classify land as wasteland, under-utilized or empty is a much used practice when identifying it ‘as a resource available for global investment’ (Li 2014:592). The perception of La Guajira as being abandoned, poor, corrupt and characterized by lawlessness and smuggling is, at the same time, shared by many of those I met during fieldwork. One example is an ex-military person who worked with the corporate security arrangements of the 1990s and 2000s, and stated that ‘if you did not work in the mine or in the state, you were engaged in contraband’ (personal communication, Marco, May 2019). Implicit in this claim is the dismissal of local labor and farming, despite it being the dominant way of providing for oneself and the community at that time.

Local indigenous peoples and mestizo urban dwellers from La Guajira replicate part of this narrative of La Guajira as being abandoned, corrupt and lawless. Even

which had anyway not yet become a standard procedure of Environmental Impact Assessments in the 1980s.

<sup>8</sup> The facts, however, show that this perception is not entirely true: until 1954 Uribia was the regional capital, it has always been predominantly inhabited by the Wayúu, it is known as Colombia’s “indigenous capital”, and according to the last census of 2005 it had a population of 117,674 (estimated to reach 200,000+ by 2020) (Municipio de Uribia 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Spanish for inhabitants of La Guajira.



when it is done more self-ironically by these locals, they voice the perception that the region is Colombia's 'Wild West'. La Guajira's wild and daunting culture was what the mining corporation set out to fix through its perception of itself as bringing order and legality to the region. It is arguably also what it continues to strive for today, though in a different contemporary context and therefore with different means (Guáqueta 2013; Jakobsen 2020).

As a reaction to the arrival of the mining infrastructure, the 'natural owners' who had been living on the land for decades, though without title, began to enclose their properties with fences (Acosta 2012:3). The Wayúu narrative of pride is that for around five hundred years they had successfully resisted the pressures of colonialism without giving up their autonomy. Before the arrival of the mine, there were no roads in La Guajira, only trails, and few 'whites' had ever entered the area (Pacini in Chomsky, Leech, and Striffler 2007:38). The company's workers had to 'open and close hasps<sup>10</sup> everywhere' to fulfill their task of exploration (Acosta 2012:4) and make new trails in the bush to drill holes around 300 meters deep to search for coal. The geological assessment determining the program for the construction of the mine was completed in June 1980. In total, 53 million dollars were invested at that stage according to Acosta (2012:4). As the coal was found to be not only large in quantity but also of high quality, the project, which the national authorities saw as 'the redeemer of decades of abandonment of La Guajira', could be initiated (ibid.; ibid: 11). The US-based company Morrison Knudsen International was selected as the main contractor for the construction of the El Cerrejón Zona Norte Carboniferous Complex, including the infrastructure (Acosta 2012:41), but many more companies were involved as sub-contractors. The workers who built the coal complex were described as brave, capable of enduring hard situations, with a lot of heat and insecure journeys into the bush, often without knowing when they would be able to return to the camp to rest. As Acosta writes, they were loyal (*fiel*) and proud of being about to convert an abandoned place into 'one of the most important coal complexes in the world' (ibid.:6). The construction work is narrated as having been tough, especially due to the hard weather conditions of extreme heat and sudden heavy showers of rain. Wildlife was also described as being a challenge, and the contrast between the city (where the employees came from) and this experience of nature is often highlighted in the two historical accounts on which this paper is largely based (Acosta 2012 and Girado Caballero 1998).<sup>11</sup> No doubt constructing one of the world's largest open-pit coal mines was perceived to be hard work, but the excitement of the mission and the discovery of large coal reserves seemed to have been an energizer for the emerging 'Cerrejón family'.<sup>12</sup> As Ramiro Santa (2019), a

<sup>10</sup> The Spanish word is '*broche*', a metal clasp in two pieces, one of which hooks or fits into the other.

<sup>11</sup> Girado and Acosta have similar ways of narrating the history of the Cerrejón mine: they both with a certain tone of nostalgia and pride, and they see themselves as taking an active part in a historical moment in what was, until their arrival, an 'abandoned place' on earth.

<sup>12</sup> This resembles Paul Gaventa's account of coal-mining in Tennessee in the US a decade or two earlier: '[b]ooms have a habit of instilling reckless enthusiasm, and in Middlesboro [the coal project he researched] there developed a spirit of excitement, almost drunkenness, often found in frontier expansion' (Gaventa 1980:56).

fellow corporate manager from an oil transport company with close ties to Cerrejón, writes in a public defense and appraisal of Cerrejón in a national newspaper, his memory of the 1980s is that:

The new conversation and happiness for all was about the expectations [...] of the Cerrejón project, which had brought decent employment opportunities with excellent salaries. Commerce, transportation, hotels and restaurants, rentals of houses, offices and vehicles, engineering companies and even tourism began to flourish thanks to the mining and oil industry.

In 1983 a different pair of observer's eyes saw a contrasting image: the risk of the Wayúu having to 'experience a severe cultural crisis, which may indeed result in their extinction as a culture' (Pacini 1983 in Chomsky, Leech and Striffler 2007:38). The discourse of cultural extinction is not unknown to anthropologists, and it remains part of the language of indigenous politics (see e.g. Sodikoff 2012; Sylvain 2014), including for the Wayúu (Montero 2019). This way of thinking about culture has been criticized for being too essentialist (Paradies 2006; Said 1978). In the case of La Guajira, however, the 'genocidal' aspects of this narrative are quite real. Besides several cultural 'losses' for the Wayúu population, their mortality rate is indeed high (Contreras et al. 2020). As I argue elsewhere (Jakobsen 2020), physical and social death are both present-day features of many Wayúu lives, and the high mortality rate, including what are perceived to be self-inflicted deaths like suicides, are not only tragic in themselves but can be productive in strengthening corporate security and population control. The argument presented in that research article is related to contemporary railway infrastructure.<sup>13</sup> I shall now turn to describing how the infrastructure for the Cerrejón mine was constructed in the first place.

<sup>13</sup> The work on infrastructure and mortality relates to literature on the violence of infrastructure (Cowen 2014; Appel 2012; Rodgers and O'Neill 2012) and the paradoxes and promises of infrastructure (Howe et al. 2016; Anand, Gupta, and Appel 2018).



The railway at the point it arrives at the entrance of the port area, in Media Luna.  
Photo by the author.

### **The construction of the infrastructure as engines of progress**

A port, a highway and a railway were constructed especially for the Cerrejón mine. The majority of the construction work took place in 1983-1984. The infrastructure needed in order to be able to take advantage of the large deposits of high-quality coal was considered ‘unprecedented in the history of Colombian engineering’ (Acosta 2012:11). The sixteen North American and one Colombian geomorphologist who were chosen to ‘furrow the water’ to build the port were described as having ‘the privilege to bring a monument of Colombia’s development into being: the Bolívar port’ (ibid.). Taking out a boat that had earlier been the yacht Frank Sinatra, these scientists looked along the Caribbean coast for the most appropriate location for this port. The area they chose was Portete Bay, in ‘*Media Luna*’ (‘half-moon’, after the shape of the bay). This is one of the most arid parts of La Guajira, and life here was described as being drowsy, eventless and indifferent to any illegalities that occurred:

Media Luna was a village of indigenous people condemned to watch the years go by in smugglers’ boats that traveled through the natural deep-water channel, originating from the ocean to Portete Bay through the sacred designs of nature. Its inhabitants were destined to let their days go by in the drowsiness of the tropical sun, lying in a small boat under the shadow of their *yotojoro* bower [a type of wood used for construction]. [...] Nothing extraordinary ever happened. That was the monotonous becoming of their daily routine (Acosta 2012:10).

In the monotonous and eventless humdrum life of La Guajira described by Acosta, people were 'destined' for a passive fishing life and 'condemned' to observe smugglers doing illegal business without a care. This representation of the time 'before the mine', which repeats the general perception of La Guajira mentioned above, might have been helpful in justifying and glorifying the arrival of this 'lawful megaproject' that would bring progress and order to the area (ibid.). During 1983 and 1985 the coal export terminal, which was three times larger than any other port that so far existed in Colombia, was built in record time. When it was built, the people of Media Luna 'ceased to be passive spectators of the illicit passage of smugglers' and now became 'active witnesses of the arrival of gigantic tugboats' carrying large-scale machinery to La Guajira for the most 'ambitious megaproject of Colombian mining' (Acosta 2012:12).



The highway next to the railway that was built around 1983 (Acosta 2012: 17).

The highway between the port and the mine was drawn as a straight line crossing the Guajira peninsula which 'bulldozer D-6' had to follow, 'zigzagging only when it stumbled upon one of the 114 ranch-houses made of mud and *yotojoro* that existed at that time where the road should pass' (Acosta 2012:18). Achille Mbembe (2003:29) reminds us how the figure of the bulldozer is a symbol of colonial occupation, being, he continues, 'critical to the techniques of disabling the enemy', as it orchestrates the systematic sabotage of the social infrastructure that complements the appropriation of land. Mbembe calls this 'infrastructural warfare' (ibid.). Even though the war mentality was not as explicit in 1980s La Guajira as in Mbembe's case study of occupied Palestine, the continued battle to dismantle the fences of local inhabitants, which the latter promptly rebuilt in order to protect themselves, illustrates the confrontational character of the acquisition of land. At the same time, however, this is also an early battle over the hearts and minds of the local population, a central component of counterinsurgency warfare



(Kilcullen 2006), but also a strategy that can be understood as a technology of corporate security (Jakobsen 2020; see also Dunlap 2019a; Dunlap 2019b).

The road was built in 1981 and 1982 by Intercor and operated by three contractors (Acosta 2012:23). Construction of the railway line began in 1983 next to the highway. This job was carried out by Morison Knudsen using four contractors along the 150 kilometers of tracks. The coal train's first journey took place on January 10, 1985, carrying 4,500 tons of coal distributed into fifty wagons. Soon its use was increased, and today nine trains run daily, each consisting of 150 wagons with an average capacity of 110 tons per wagon (Semana 2018). On February 23, 1985, the then President of the Republic, Belisario Betancur, officially inaugurated the coal boarding operation, and in the 1980s alone the mine and its facilities received three presidential visits, according to Acosta (2012). On March 11 of the same year, the Danish company Elsam received the first 33,044 tons of coal from the North Zone, exported from Puerto Bolívar (ibid.: 35).

What this narrative illustrates thus far is that the mining pioneers' perception of their project – to make things ready for the Cerrejón mine – was based on colonial legacies of a quest for civilization, which were used to justify the destruction of local livelihoods and natural infrastructure by promoting the new mega-project as bringing progress and order to what was perceived to be an uncivilized and lawless region. In the next section I will turn to the actual acquisition strategies that were used to engineer consent and acquire the land needed for the huge coal complex and its infrastructure. These strategies build on the same forms of colonial legacies and represent early versions of today's corporate security practices.



Arid landscape in Media Luna. May 2019. Photo by the author.

## LAND ACQUISITION STRATEGIES: THE EARLY VERSION OF CORPORATE SECURITY PRACTICES

Large stretches of land were needed to build the coal complex. The department of public affairs of Intercor's 'lands team' was responsible for acquiring the land from the indigenous peoples living where the railway, the port, the highway and the mine were to be located. Despite the perception of La Guajira as being wild, lawless and insecure, Acosta recounts how the employees from the city 'met a kind, hospitable, faithful people', and he continues by describing how, '[d]espite the difficult period of violence that La Guajira was going through due to the *marimbera* bonanza that was in full rage, they [the employees] moved quietly from one place to another: the same inhabitants protected them' (Acosta 2012:7). Different sorts of kinship ties were created, as we shall see below. Despite potential friendship or kinship, land nonetheless had to be freed from both inhabitants and houses, which was not carried out without obstacles.

Intercor bought the land where the road and the railway were to pass. The way this was done, Acosta writes, was that Intercor officials bought *las mejoras*<sup>14</sup> to the indigenous peoples, paid them for one day of work to dismantle their huts or ranches, paid the costs of transporting their belongings, and paid for another day of work to construct a new home at the new site (Acosta 2012:20). In the extraction area further south around this time, land was also bought by the company, but in many cases the latter let its residents stay on the land *en comodato*, meaning as a loan, until the company needed the land to extend the pits (personal conversation, May 2019 and December 2018).

The mine's corporate strategies were not completely uniform throughout the construction sites of the port area (northern La Guajira), the mining area (southern La Guajira) and the railway area (stretching from south to north). According to a local anthropologist and former employee of the Cerrejón foundation whom I spoke to several times during fieldwork, the mine area came to be dominated by 'a very neoliberal development model', whereas in the port area there was 'a permanent conflict, but different, more like a love-hate relationship, like a couple' (personal conversation, February 2019). What the anthropologist's account indicates, interestingly, can be compared to Marina Welker's (2014) distinction between patronage (akin to the love-hate kinship relationship) and the sustainable development model (comparable to the neoliberal model of responsabilization and self-governance), two modes she identified as working simultaneously and sometimes as creating internal conflicts within the company she was studying. In the case of 1980s northern La Guajira, the corporate patronage involved both kinship and conquest, as the charity provided by the corporate employees came with invasion and hard security practices, as will be described in greater detail below.

<sup>14</sup> Literally translated as 'improvements', but here meaning compensation money. This is the amount that is negotiated between the company and local people.

In line with Mbembe's (2003:25) description of colonial occupation as 'a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area – of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations', the work carried out by the lands team in this period laid the foundations for the corporate territorialization that has now become normalized in La Guajira. Research on the corporation underlines how the general figure of the modern corporation is founded upon the values of colonization and conquest, but also how it is, at the same time, related to improvement and development as a form of power that can act at and across distance (Barkan 2013; Ciepley 2013; Whyte 2018; Welker 2014; Rajak 2011). This pendular movement between conquest and kinship is as fundamental to colonial projects<sup>15</sup> as to state building in general, as well as being a key element in the use of today's hard and soft corporate security practices. In the following I will explore further how these social strategies became an aspect of how land to build the mine's transport infrastructure (port and railway) was acquired.

### **Land for infrastructure: invading by creating kinship**

Local *guajiros* were told that the mining complex and its infrastructure would be temporary, but that it was also a 'great project' for the Wayúu people (personal communications, February 2019). The length of the temporary period was not specified at that point, but at the time of writing (2020) the mining complex has existed for 36 years, which, according to the Wayúu I spoke to, is way beyond being temporary.

A key employee involved in the task of acquiring land for the railway and the port was Alberto Girado Caballero, who wrote a book entitled *Nu Shon Kashi - Hijo de La Luna*<sup>16</sup> (Girado Caballero 1998) about how he, as a loyal employee negotiating land deals with the Wayúu population, was given the indigenous appellation 'Son of the Moon' by the indigenous leader of Uribia (a town perceived as 'the Wayúu capital of Colombia').<sup>17</sup> In both Acosta and Girado's accounts, the initial impression the reader receives of the company's encounters with the indigenous population is positive, namely that the local people welcomed them. One example is Acosta writing about their hospitality: 'Wayúu women gave them [the employees from the lands' team] coffee in their mugs of *totumo*:<sup>18</sup> this was the welcome greeting' (Acosta 2012:26). Similarly, in his story Girado sought to show

<sup>15</sup> On Barak (2020) (among others) argues that coal has been so influential in the world economy that it 'powered empire'. In his book he traces coal's imperial infrastructure and shows, concretely, how the Middle East—as an idea—was made by (British) coal (and not oil which came later). This dynamic has elsewhere been termed "coalonization" (Mwenda and Bond in Tokar and Gilbertson 2020). Mitchell (2013) explains that the history of coal is, at the same time, also (part of) the history of the creation of democracy.

<sup>16</sup> Wayúunaiki and Spanish for 'Son of the Moon', referring to the appellation he received from the Wayúu, acknowledging him as one of them (Montero de Daza and Mestra Narváez 2015:150).

<sup>17</sup> The majority of the interlocutors I asked about their acquaintance with him or their memories from that time reacted with skepticism, stating that 'no non-wayúu would ever get such an honour'. This stresses how rare it was that this corporate white man should have been given this title.

<sup>18</sup> A fruit that is traditionally used as mug or bowl when it has been peeled and dried.

that the locals really appreciated him, despite the fact that he was interrupting their lives and made them move. Reading the book, however, it becomes clear that some locals did resist and how challenging it was to obtain the Wayúu's consent and get them move according to the plan.

One example of the challenges Girado faced is reflected in his presentation of the first indigenous leader he negotiated with, who is described as 'problematic, conflictive and even aggressive' (Girado Caballero 1998:33). He threw rocks at Girado and his team's cars when they arrived and confiscated the engineers' topographical equipment. As with the other stories of Girado's encounters, despite the conflict and aggression, it all ended with 'the full negotiations being carried out' (ibid.). Girado writes that from the beginning of his job in La Guajira, he and his team felt pressured by Morrison Knudsen and their American engineer Lee Wilson who were leading the construction work, as he [the engineer] 'urgently required the land "in order to give it with the machete"', referring to the bulldozers that were to make the land ready for the project (ibid.: 34).

In order to succeed in his urgent acquisition of the land, Girado's strategy was to get to know the indigenous population personally and become friends with them before starting to negotiate (Girado Caballero 1998:50). Many Wayúu parents wanted Girado to be the godfather of their children, according to the two historical accounts. In fact, Girado became godfather to more than sixty Wayúu children, according to Acosta<sup>19</sup> (2012:28). In his book, Girado expresses some of his concerns, or rather 'conditions', for his becoming a godparent,<sup>20</sup> fearing that there would be an 'avalanche of godchildren' (ibid.). One of his conditions was that they should realize that he could suddenly be removed from his position and leave, meaning that the child would end up without a godfather. Another precaution he took was to make sure they would understand that he was just an employee receiving a salary every thirty days, which he needed in order that he and his family could live. This meant that he could not give them presents all the time – he would only give them the baptism dress, so that the child would at least not go to the baptismal font naked. According to Girado, 'every single one [...] accepted the rules' (Girado Caballero 1998:25). He ends this story with the conclusion that 'I think that my godfatherhood resulted in the fact that our relationships grew closer and closer'. A former security employee told me in an interview, without referring to this book, about similar experiences he had during his involvement with these local communities in the 1990s. As part of his job, he occasionally visited communities around the mine and along the railway, assuming that these visits

<sup>19</sup> Girado's Catholic religion often appears in the book. It is not common for Wayúu to practice the catholic religion, though some do so, and the region has been influenced by Spanish colonizers and the Catholic Protestant missionaries who followed them. According to Girado, baptism was the only Catholic ritual carried out by the Wayúu.

<sup>20</sup> In Spanish *compadrazgo*, meaning "the reciprocal relationship or the social institution of such relationship existing between a godparent or godparents and the godchild and its parents in the Spanish-speaking world (as in South America)" (Merriam webster dictionary 2019).



were appreciated. He stated: 'indigenous peoples really liked me. I gave them presents' (personal conversation with Marco, May 2019).

The form of kinship-making that these stories describe resembles what others have characterized as colonial-era corporate paternalism (Ferguson 2005:378) or corporate patronage, as mentioned above (Welker 2014). Providing immediate needs and gifts in exchange for compliance turns the company into a surrogate state (not least during this epoch, when La Guajira was arguably even more 'abandoned' by the state and its services). As Welker (2014:69) points out, such patronage models have the effect that the 'munificence and agency' of the patron is co-produced through local demands and requests, and because of the threat that without compliance and consent the benefits will not continue. According to a study by two Colombian historians, Girado's title of 'Son of the Moon' 'indicates the materialization of a political strategy undertaken by the company which sought from the beginning to gain the trust of the natives settled in the area' (Montero de Daza and Mestra Narváez 2015:150). This strategy, they claim, has legacies of the colonial missionaries' task of 'persuading, pacifying, reducing and congregating the Indians' (ibid.).

During the preparations for the mine in the 1980s, such patron-client relations also had a sexual aspect: some of the exploration workers married local '*jovencitas*' (young women) (Acosta 2012:9). Acosta mentions this casually after narrating how the pioneers 'usually had beer' in the canteen at night when arriving back at the camp, listening to the local music, Vallenato, and greeting the locals who were 'teasing them' (ibid.). He gives no further explanation for these marriages.<sup>21</sup> The accounts of the Wayúu, however, indicate that marriages between alijunas (non-Wayúu) and young Wayúu women happened so that the corporate representatives could acquire titles to the women's land (CINEP/PPP and FMW 2018). Wayúu society is matrilineal, meaning that territories are called by the mother's name and that children have their mother's surname (Reverol 2017), while property is also often in the name of the woman. The sexual undertones and the violent means by which obstacles were removed by Girado and his team are analogous to Henri Lefebvre's elaboration of the production of 'abstract space' (Lefebvre 2005). Such a space appears to be homogeneous, Lefebvre suggests, but it is really deeply complex and multiform (p. 287). It is a lethal space which destroys its (historical) conditions, 'its own (internal) differences', as well as any emerging differences, 'in order to impose an abstract homogeneity' (Lefebvre 2005:370). This space is therefore instrumental for both capital and the modern state (Brenner and Elden 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Marrying local women is a common practice, partly as a military insurgence strategy to exploit kinship-based alliances and manipulate people, according to counter-insurgency expert Kilcullen (2007). The technique has been applied in places 'as diverse as Somalia, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Indonesia'. The strategy works, Kilcullen explains, by creating a bond with the community, exploiting kinship-based alliances, and so 'embedding' the AQ network into the society, allowing its manipulation (ibid.: 1).

Lefebvre wonders how ‘the users’ of this space (i.e. the local inhabitants in this case) keep silent and do not revolt against the damaging manipulation of themselves and their spaces<sup>22</sup> (p. 51). This issue is what has created a divide between sons and fathers in Wayúu families over previous generations’ supposed passivity in not confronting the acquisition of land for mining. As a way of providing an answer to that question, Lefebvre writes that abstract space is ‘buttressed by non-critical (positive) knowledge, backed up by a frightening capacity for violence, and maintained by a bureaucracy which has laid hold of the gains of capitalism’ (p. 52). Making abstract space is a tool of domination (p. 370) that ‘serves those forces which make a *tabula rasa* of whatever stands in their way’ (p. 285). The question is, then, whether there were no expressions of revolt in 1980s and 1990s Guajira? Did all *guajiros* just subordinate themselves to the power of the company, passively believing in and consenting to the land team’s promises of progress? The next section addresses this question.

### **Negotiations of power, acts of resistance and the engineering of consent**

Acosta and Girado both write about the ways in which they perceived the Wayúu as ‘cheating’ the Intercor workers to get better deals for agreeing to move. Acosta writes about people who tried to negotiate deals with the company twice, only moving to a new house nearby the day after coming to a deal in another house (Acosta 2012:27). Girado uses the term ‘*malicia indígena*’ (native cunning),<sup>23</sup> a popular Colombian term, to describe an allegedly inherent character in the Wayúu that makes them do bad things, that is, ‘their subtlety’ (Girado Caballero 1998:41) in being sneaky and opportunistic, for example, asking for more money or taking advantage of the situation in one way or another. Then, after writing about this alleged characteristic of the Wayúu he is negotiating with, he always ends on a happy note about how they became good friends because he managed to elicit their respect and tease out and disrupt or counteract their cunning behavior. I interpret this as though on the one hand he finds all this very pathetic and frustrating, while on the other hand he respects them for it (as that might be what he would have done in such a situation himself, because it is a way of resisting domination). As he writes, the Wayúu tried to put themselves ‘in equal conditions to ours in order to negotiate one on one’ (ibid.). However, the unequal power dynamic was not so easily overcome. Despite efforts to counteract or circumvent the company’s power, the Wayúu largely left the lands that were required, while the railway, once it had been built, ended up dividing the indigenous territory in

<sup>22</sup> This discussion about the possible reasons for the lack of revolt is broad, and includes, as an example, Bourdieu’s (1972) term ‘doxa’, denoting a society’s unquestioned and taken for granted features, as well as Gramsci’s (1989) concept of passive consent. Benson and Kirsch (2010) have discussed this in terms of the ‘politics of resignation’, while Andrea Furnaro (2019) discusses reasons for the hegemony and passivity in mining regions in Chile by looking at how dissent is contained.

<sup>23</sup> There is no single definition of the term *malicia indígena*, but in a combination of sources, it points to the ability to combine creativity, astuteness, prudence, and hypocrisy so that it is sufficient to make up for any possible “underdevelopment” in, for example, education, poverty and abandonment by the state. It differs over whether this is seen as a positive awareness and smartness that the indigenous peoples of Colombia possess, or as a negative characteristic that makes them lie and deceive others.

two (Montero de Daza and Mestra Narváez 2015:149). The indigenous peoples retain their perception of having been cheated<sup>24</sup>, just as Girado experienced them ‘cheating’ him. Their memories from this period are of being told that this company had come with a grand project for the Wayúu, but today they feel cheated, as well as sad that they gave up their land for the mine. This has caused generational conflicts in Wayúu families, as the young and now grown-ups perceive their fathers’ and grandfathers’ passive consent as having destroyed the ability of the Wayúu to survive. One Wayúu leader put it this way: ‘[the company] only negotiated with the leaders who spoke Spanish. The company offered presents. But the people did not know what they were signing up to: their own eviction’ (personal communication, March 2019).

An example of the *malicia indigena* – or, possibly, acts of revolt – that Girado experienced was with two of the Wayúu leaders he had to negotiate with: Juan and Andres. Their ‘transfer’ (their moving, not their resettlement) went very slowly, according to Girado, because they did not want to lose the opportunity of having drinking parties three days in a row,<sup>25</sup> which would not have been possible in the new site, where they would be brought closer to family members they did not get along well with. Juan and Andres were brothers-in-law, and they lived exactly where the camp of the port area was to be located, which was why Girado was in such a hurry to get the land. His solution, as he explains it in the book, was to convert everything around their ranches to empty land belonging the company, isolating them like an island (Girado Caballero 1998:35).

Lefebvre suggests, in line with Mbembe’s (2003:29) dystopic tale of the figure of the bulldozer, that the forces of abstract space ‘seem to grind down and crush everything before them, with space performing the function of a plane, a bulldozer or a tank’ (p. 285). At the risk of over-dramatizing the past and blurring nuances, my point is that the bulldozer used by Girado’s lands team, just like the strategy of containment he used, was more than simply a technical tool with which to clear the way for building infrastructure. The bulldozer also has a symbolic value and is a political technology. It is linked to the notions of the ecocide-genocide nexus, indicating how extractive technologies can be destructive of both lands and eco-systems, as well as different modalities of systemic killing, including social death and deprivation (Short 2016; Dunlap 2020; Jakobsen 2020). Bulldozers and the strategy of containment were also used in the area of the mine, to which I will now turn.

### **Land for the mine: evictions and resettlements**

In 1985 the first community was evicted to clear land for the mine itself, which was called Manantial. According to an account by a member of the neighboring

<sup>24</sup> This echoes findings from Golub (2014:30) on the Ipli feeling cheated by the mining company they were negotiating with.

<sup>25</sup> The narrative of the Wayúu’s drinking habits is closely related to the “myth of the drunken native American” (Duran 1995:95), which has persisted from colonial times to today, reflecting a larger history of colonial perceptions of “natives” being poor, badly educated and embedded in cultural conflicts, and ignoring the possibility that state policies directly harm indigenous populations.

Afro-Colombian community of Tabaco (where the pioneer camp was placed), which was later evicted by force, this first eviction in 1985 was also violent: 'ESMAD [the anti-riot police known for its brutal behavior] was there, and people resisted, especially the women' (personal communication, January 2019). Then the Wayúu community of Espinal was evicted in 1993 and was split into two: Nuevo espinal and 4 de noviembre, communities that are today *resguardos*, indigenous reserves. After that, three Afro-Colombian communities, Saraita, Caracolí and Tabaco, were evicted, about which (especially Tabaco) there is more documentation than about the previous eviction (ibid.; personal communication, April 2019). According to a young local lawyer, more communities than most local people know of were evicted in the mid-90s, as they 'happened in silence', as 'so many things do around here' (personal communication, December 2018). Community members told me that at least 35 communities have been displaced from the mining zone where they used to live, most of them indigenous Wayúu, but also some Afro-Colombian communities. According to a study by Cabrera and Fierro (2013), nearly seven thousand Wayúu people have been displaced since the 1980s in order to make room for the mining complex and its transport infrastructure. Many Wayúu have never been compensated for their removal. Some communities have simply disappeared. After these first evictions, which were also the most brutal, came the phase of privatization of the company and the resettlement of Wayúu and Afro-Colombian communities.

In 2000 and 2002 the two companies, Intercor and Carbocol, were sold to a consortium composed of Glencore (Switzerland), BHP Billiton (London/Australia) and Anglo-American (UK/South Africa). 2001 became a critical year in the history of Cerrejón and the communities around it. That was the year of the violent eviction of Tabaco, which is very often referred to as a showcase of Cerrejón's direct use of physical force (Carranza et al. 2018; McKenzie and Cohen 2018). After this, Cerrejón faced a severe reputational crisis, as the social standards manager admitted when I interviewed her, making the company 'change practice' (personal communication, February 2018). She linked this to Cerrejón being privatized, which also meant that 'new perspectives' emerged on how to manage the company. As the mine was being expanded at around this time, more communities had to be moved, five being resettled from 2003 onwards. After the first round of evictions, neighboring communities, such as Roche and Tamaquito, saw how their surroundings were being transformed from an area with trading possibilities (through the traditional non-monetary *trueque* or barter economy) with friends and family members into territories that had been cleaned and cleared for mining, with gradual deforestation and the drying out of rivers (CINEP/PPP 2015; Vásquez et al. 2015).

Community members narrate that up to the point of a community being relocated, the mine's functionaries would invite the landowners out for drinks, do favors for their families, provide goats and ice for cooling down drinks during celebrations, sometimes provide fuel for driving or cooking, and become godfathers to the communities' children (Vásquez et al. 2015:155). The same kinship-making strategies that we saw taking place in the railway and port area, presented above,

were also used to engineer consent to communities' imminent relocation in the mining area.

Another sign warning the locals about their future eviction was that they could see the mine getting closer. Since the mining territory was being extended as the company bought more land, distant communities soon found themselves very close neighbors to a pit. As some of their neighboring communities had already been displaced, more felt the need to move, as they had no one to trade with, while the natural environment was changing from areas of pasturage to the dominance of heavy machinery, noise and fenced off mining areas. As the leader of one of the resettled communities told me, they were gradually being enclosed and isolated, so the 'drastic change' and the 'real impact' in fact happened years before the actual resettlement (personal communication, January 2019). In this period, which started around 2009, with the majority being resettled by 2013, Roche, Chancleta, Patilla and Las Casitas were all resettled.<sup>26</sup> They were all moved from the rural area that was being turned into a mining site to the outskirts of the town of Barrancas, in a newly built housing area next to the municipality's main road consisting of duplex houses built in a North American style. The Wayúu community of Tamaquito itself took the initiative to ask Cerrejón to resettle them, as maintaining life in their original site was becoming harder and harder. This was mostly because they had lost their neighbors and because the negative impacts of the mine were increasing, affecting their abilities to dream (CINEP/PPP 2015; Sheriff and Gilbert forthcoming). This is an example of how the containment strategy whereby Cerrejón made people move led to Tamaquito people themselves 'wanting' to move.<sup>27</sup>

For four of the five resettled communities, the type of ownership they now have is horizontal property, not common property, like they had before (interview 4, November 2018). With the horizontal property, those in the resettled communities do not own their own houses, as these are offered to them on loan (*en comodato*), which means that they are allowed and able to use the facilities. This is seen in contracts dating from 2003, where people were removed to houses owned by Cerrejón. The resettlement of the communities has weakened their social ties, destroyed their original income-generating possibilities, hampered their traditional ways of living and made self-sustainable communities dependent on a multinational company (based on several accounts from fieldwork, as well as Vásquez et al. 2015; Banks 2017). Few realized the importance of having title deeds to the land they lived on in their original territories, which weakened their ability to negotiate with the company. In parallel with the expansion of the mine, more

<sup>26</sup> These are the five communities that were officially resettled by Cerrejón, few of which are still considered to be in the process of resettlement, according to the five phases of the company's plan (Cerrejon.com n.d.).

<sup>27</sup> The story that those living in Tamaquito themselves wanted to move is the version of the story that today is normally only given by the company, whereas the community sticks to the narrative that it was Cerrejón who forced them to move. One could argue that such negotiations of the power to narrate history are illustrative of the constantly changing dynamics in these relationships between the company and local communities.

evictions have taken place, though at a slower pace, and since Tamaquito no entire communities have been displaced. A few communities are currently fearing future displacement, either because they can see the mine getting closer due to its expansion (Manantialito), because the environmental impacts are increasing (Provincial), or because they have received concrete threats to leave the land, private individuals appearing almost out of nowhere and claiming the land to be theirs (Rocío).



Cerrejón mining pits, satellite photo, Google Earth, 2020.

This story of early corporate security practices describes making kinship as a way to compensate for the bulldozers' rampant destruction of local livelihoods. The colonial legacies that are inherent in the civilizing mission of the mining pioneers were effective at making people consent, but they also involved some dilemmas. Along with the gifts and sporadic service provision, a process of increasing militarization took place in the mining area and towards the port, which included the installation of surveillance infrastructure and harder security practices.

## **THE BECOMING OF CORPORATE SECURITY: REVERSING SECURITY LOGICS**

In order to learn more about Cerrejón's security arrangements from their historical perspective, I snowballed my way through to a person who had been very close to

the security design of the company from the last half of the 1990s to 2011. I will call this person Marco.<sup>28</sup> One of the first things he told me was that Cerrejón (which he speaks of as ‘we’) ‘had very structured security norms: we said we were “a private security company extracting coal”’ (personal communication, May 2019). In order to give me some idea about how security was organized, he drew a dot with five circles around it, and started explaining the levels of security rings, all of which were there to protect the dot in the middle: the mine. First came private security, then ‘technology’, then the national police, and then the army. What he called ‘social work’ was the fifth and last security ‘ring’.

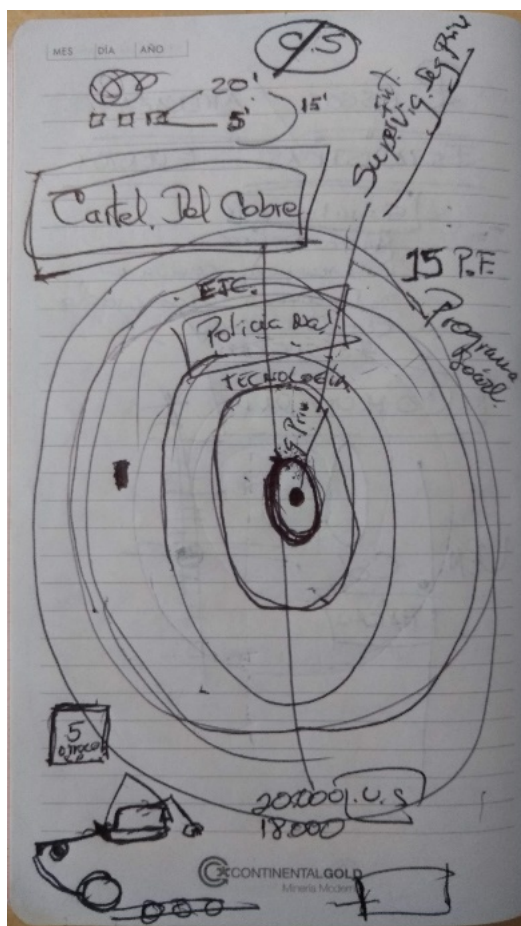


Fig. 1. Security rings around the mine. Drawing by Marco in my notebook, May 2019.

According to Marco, Cerrejón’s security arrangements were designed in 1996, based on what he called ‘a comprehensive situation assessment’. All types of state actor were involved in this work: the police, the army, the prosecutor, the human rights office, the attorney general and the municipal ombudsman. The company gathered them all together, and ‘as they were a multinational company, they had good relations with all actors’, he continued (ibid.). One of the things they studied in this situational assessment were the ‘basic needs’ of the people and communities surrounding the mine and its infrastructure. In his characterization

<sup>28</sup> I cannot give more detailed information on his position or role, as he wished to be anonymized due to the sensitive issues we spoke about, as well as because of his current job related to security.



of the population, he explained to me how ‘the indigenous people have many weapons, they are armed’. That was one reason why he also had to include defensive tactics in his corporate security arrangements (ibid.).

He told me that out of the security budget (primarily intended to pay for contracted security workers, the military, technology etc.), he also had to pay for some social work in communities. He had to ‘do this for security reasons’, he explained to me, that is, as a more strategic form of social work of the company, complementary to what the Communities’ Department did. This pool of money for social work was directed at those communities from which there was the risk of a threat to the operation, he told me. Social work, however, was a subordinate task at that time. The reason why Marco talked about it is most likely because I showed a certain interest in it. However, physical security was still the dominant method. Let us go through the different security rings around the mine, as he drew them in my notebook (see Fig. 1).

The first ring around the dot in the middle, representing the mine itself, was the private security the mining company contracted, which is regulated by the state’s supervision of private security organizations.<sup>29</sup> He told me that they had contracted 1200 security guards around year 2000 who were stationed in different places spread around the mining site, the railway area and the port.

The second ring was technology, that is, technological equipment such as cameras, alarms, sensors and illumination. The cameras were placed within five to seven kilometers of the mine, he told me. Knowing the geography around the mining area, I estimate that it covered a number of local Wayúu and Afro-Colombian communities, many of which I visited during fieldwork.

The third ring was the national police, and the fourth was the army, with which the company had formal collaboration agreements.<sup>30</sup> It occurred to me several times during fieldwork that, when the topic of the collaboration agreements was raised, corporate and security actors would instantly defend it or try to normalize them with reference to the country’s history of civil war, something that has been normal practice since 1996. In this case, Marco told me that there are around a hundred of these collaboration agreements between companies and the military nationally. The agreement was basically that ‘they did security for us, and we gave them resources’, but only for the soldiers’ well-being. ‘We gave them cars, improved their food: for example, they got a hundred million, but they never got that in money (cash). We were not allowed to give weapons or even radios, they had to use their own for that. We could not finance anything that had to do with communication’ (personal conversation with Marco, May 2019). Another corporate manager told me, in an attempt to downplay the significance of the

<sup>29</sup> The Superintendence of Private Security and Surveillance (*super intendencia de seguridad privada del estado*) is a national technical body attached to the Ministry of National Defense, but with administrative and financial autonomy. It is responsible for exercising control, inspection and surveillance over private security and surveillance services.

<sup>30</sup> In Spanish: *convenios de cooperacion*.



contracts, that the company is allowed to provide things like 'soft drinks' to the soldiers (personal communication with Drummond employee, February 2018). Such agreements are still normal practice for extractive companies in Colombia today (La Liga contra el Silencio 2019).

Around the early 2000s, the violent conflict in Colombia had (one of its) peak(s). There were attacks on Cerrejón's infrastructure, mostly from FARC and the ELN, so in general the security guards were very much on the alert (personal communications, March and May 2019). There was a curfew, and Cerrejón employees were not allowed to travel on the roads without military protection. So, when corporate managers drove around to distribute benefits to communities, they were accompanied by the military. Marco believed he had been in touch with 222 Wayúu rancherías<sup>31</sup> along the rail line, meaning almost all of them, during his time with the company. 'Benefits' and 'social programs' were, as mentioned, what constituted the fifth and last ring of the corporate security design (personal conversation with Marco, May 2019).

His examples of social programs included the distribution of 'materials', such as water tanks and wood, to the most affected communities. I asked Marco how the communities felt about him arriving with the military, and he said that they were all right with that. 'Cerrejón was a friend. It was a salvation', he added (ibid.). The water tanks distributed by the company, he remarked, always had to have a number, name and logo on them, otherwise people would just sell them, he said. This corporate mistrust of the local population became evident several times throughout the interview. He mentioned, for example, how the mine workers supposedly stole food and clothing provided by the company while they were at work to resell them in clandestine shops outside the mine, and how workers would even sell the newly built expensive house that had been provided to them with a huge discount by the company to get 'money for a big car, ladies, liquor, a pistol [... like a] typical *guajiro*' (ibid.). The corporate security organs also had to control this illicit behavior by the mine's employees.<sup>32</sup>

### **Strengthened security and reputational pressure: paramilitary ties**

During the early 2000s, when the violent conflict was having huge impacts on the corporate infrastructure and the owners of Cerrejón were changing, the company began to train the public forces in the voluntary principles of security and human rights (Voluntary Principles 2011). Marco interpreted this as 'we demanded it, and we paid for it' and continued: 'Cerrejón has never been involved in cases like those of, for example, Drummond; we have always been very strict' (personal conversation with Marco, May 2019). This self-presentation about being strict and following the highest standards is echoed in other interviews I conducted with

<sup>31</sup> Traditional wayúu housing areas.

<sup>32</sup> The suspicions of employees and local populations held by the corporate and/or security employees is something I experienced many times during fieldwork. I read it as part of their framing of themselves as the 'ordered' few who followed international standards for good conduct, while 'local society' (or simply "La Guajira") represented disorder, lawlessness and instability.

corporate managers, and it is also repeated in the annual yearly reports, as well as in most other corporate communications. The focus on voluntary principles began just when three union leaders who were workers in Drummond, another big coal company in Colombia, were killed by paramilitaries. Drummond was accused of having financed the paramilitary group to kill the union leaders after they had been demanding better working conditions. After years of experiencing 'reputational losses', it was not until 2007 that the case was brought to court, the company being declared innocent in the first instance (Sarmiento 2008:141). However, ex-paramilitaries have testified in court that Drummond ordered and paid for the killings (PAX 2014), and the court cases have continued. In 2019 the case reached the new Special Jurisdiction for Peace tribunal (JEP), set up to deal with atrocities committed during the violent conflict and established as part of the Peace Agreement between FARC and the government (El Gobierno Nacional y las FARC-EP 2016).

There is still no final decision in the Drummond case (El Espectador 2020). During fieldwork I learned how much controversy this event has created in the coal sector in Colombia: most NGOs believe that all the coal companies still have ties with paramilitary forces and are certain that Drummond paid the paramilitaries to kill the union leaders in 2001. They attribute the fact that Drummond has still not been found guilty to the company's ability to pay for the best lawyers, and it also has the right ties to the country's political elite. Drummond, on the other hand, denies all guilt. Moreover, a manager tried to convince me in an interview that it was the NGOs that had paid the witnesses to lie in court, in order to get the company sentenced. For Cerrejón, the case has come up in many interviews as a way of claiming that Cerrejón is a strictly legal company that has never had such cases brought against it. According to lawyers with extensive knowledge of Cerrejón whom I interviewed, there was no doubt that there has been, and still are, ties between this company too and paramilitary forces, which work through the privatized and contracted security organs that normally do 'the dirty work' for Cerrejón.<sup>33</sup>

### **Private security and surveillance: the glue between the dots**

This 'dirty work' consists of several elements, some of which are more formalized than others. To do surveillance and 'maintain order', the figure of el caballero ('knight' or 'horse rider') was invented (personal conversation with Marco, May 2019). I first learned about this figure from a retired private security guard, who explained to me that these were contracted private security guards dressed as farmers riding horses in the rocky areas around the mine where rural communities lived. Like secret police, they went about observing 'what was going

<sup>33</sup> These NGOs lament that they have still not been able to collect proper evidence (personal communications February 2019 and March 2019). A few times I was tempted to take up that investigation task up myself, not least when one lawyer suddenly told me about an imprisoned ex-paramilitary who most likely would be willing to speak to me about past events related to this, after years of silence. After serious considerations, the lawyer and I, however, came to the conclusion that it would not be safe or wise of me to enter into that field, so I left it at that.

on' in the local area (personal conversation with ex-security guard, March 2019). He used the same language as Marco, explaining to me that this figure was, according to him, 'the first ring of security' for the mine. Moreover, these caballeros were mostly looking for any suspicious events that can be related to guerilla activity in the area (personal communication, March 2019). Wanting to know more about this figure, I asked Marco about it. He explained to me that 'they look like farmers for their own safety,' as they had been attacked (and a few killed) by guerrillas in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when they went around the local area armed and dressed in uniforms. I interpret this as a way of legitimizing 'dressing up in civil clothing only with machetes', which, according to him, made it easier for them to do their job as informers, because, as he said, 'me alimentaban con información (they fed me with information)' (personal conversation with Marco, May 2019). According to Marco, they were 'informants' who would, for instance, call the office for land 'if they saw a community building a house', as that was illegal in those places where the mine had bought the land and let communities stay there on loan terms (personal communication, May 2019).

An ex-Cerrejón employee and now a professional academic, Alexandra Guáqueta provides further interesting perspectives on this. She writes in an academic journal article that '[n]avigating the environment was difficult for extractive multinationals. Their large protection agreements with the armed forces and the private security contracts were indispensable, but it made them vulnerable to potential complicity with human rights violations, especially in cases where security forces had secret ties to illegal paramilitary. Also, at times, soldiers tended to view surrounding communities as potential enemies [...] because they were influenced by the Marxist guerrillas that had declared extractives and their employees to be military targets' (Guáqueta 2013:136). First of all, her information indicates why the companies sought to legitimize the cooperation agreements so rapidly in conversations with me: they have been widely criticized and subjected to allegations of violations of human rights by security actors. Secondly, it shows the politicized and conflictual character of the debate around the use of security actors in extractive spaces, not least how it was completely embedded in the violent conflict between the FARC and the government, on whose side the paramilitaries were operating.

The ties to paramilitary forces were generally huge reputational issues to manage for many of the mining companies. Teo Balvé (2013:240) suggests that paramilitary activities are 'deeply tied to initiatives aimed at producing governable spaces and subjects, expanding trade, and attracting capital'. Paramilitaries work to generate fear. One Wayúu leader, whom I call Hector, was displaced from his community because of threats from both the paramilitary and the guerillas. He told me about what he called the 'silenced époque [...] That was during the violent conflict.' Hector organized a few group conversations with other 'allies' of his in order for me to hear more people's stories, as well as being a means for him to 'break the silence'. During one of these group conversations, a woman who had also had to leave her community because of threats elaborated further on the 'silent époque': 'At that time we didn't speak out loud. Few had education. We were just subjects of the politicians (*'eramos sujetos de los politicos'*), we just lived, without having

opinions, without deciding for ourselves, that was how it was here [...]. The missionaries taught us how to build our capacities with inspiration from indigenous peoples from Cordoba. Then we slowly began to make documentation, we learned about our rights, we got education where we learned about law 113 and law 89; before that, all this had been hidden to us [...]. It was becoming like a bible for us to read the legislation.' Supported by Christian missionaries, she started mobilizing people. She said that people saw her as 'changing the minds of people' and therefore, she said, 'Many politicians did not want me around, 'they prohibited me from entering Barrancas because they did not want me to change the minds of the people [...] I was labelled as *guerrillera* [...] Some critical voices said that I was distorting the Wayúu vision as though it made them *guerrilleros*. [...] I hid and lied about my identity' (personal communication, March 2019).

The threat and popular labelling of people as belonging to the guerillas is not a formal corporate security practice. Instead, I suggest seeing it as the glue between the dots that Marco drew, the informality that makes formality work.

Based on insights about today's practices that I acquired through observations, interviews and from different types of documents, it can be observed that the picture Marco drew of corporate security in 1996 has been practically stood on its head today. This possibility was confirmed when, only a few days after my interview with Marco, I had the chance to speak to the then president of the mining company. I wanted him to tell me about their current security arrangements and how they prioritize the money for corporate security. Even though he was reluctant to go more deeply into the question, as I had expected, he did give me some concrete figures that provide approximate evidence of my point about the corporate security logic having been reversed: today he estimated that around 80% of corporate security was social work and 20% involved physical security (personal communication with CEO, May 2019).

## **TOWARDS CORPORATE SECURITY TODAY**

From around 2007, Cerrejón started focusing strategically on improving its Social License to Operate.<sup>34</sup> At that point, the industry was experiencing several cases of resistance and continued attacks by guerilla groups (especially on the railways), while the owners of Cerrejón had changed from ExxonMobil (US) to BHP Billiton, Anglo American and Xtrata (European). According to a study by Nataly Sarmiento (2008), who was employed as an analyst in CSR in Cerrejón at that time,<sup>35</sup> the new European owners were more demanding, showing greater social

<sup>34</sup> A social license to operate indicates broad, ongoing social acceptance from local society (Prno and Slocombe 2012).

<sup>35</sup> This woman later became the director of the business branch of the Colombian human rights NGO, *Fundación Ideas para La Paz*, and was often hired as a consultant for the mining companies. I

awareness and sensitivity (Sarmiento 2008). The US model, which was operational when Exxon owned Cerrejón, as is still the case with the other large coal company operating in Colombia, Drummond,<sup>36</sup> was much more 'low profile', characterized by minimal participation in local daily life, fewer projects for neighboring communities, and both physical and social isolation between the corporation and the community population (ibid.: 145). She describes how the focus became increasingly oriented towards obtaining acceptance from the communities, and that CSR went from being 'philanthropic' to being 'strategic'. The way Cerrejón worked to improve its Social License to Operate was by acting as 'a generator of better living conditions in the area' and adopting a strengthened 'vision of sustainability' (Sarmiento 2008:144) directed at providing La Guajira with sustainable solutions that would last beyond the lifetime of Cerrejón. At the same time, Sarmiento reveals, Cerrejón increased its investments in (physical) security to a point where the contract with the state's forces became 'the biggest contract that the company had' (ibid.: 148). The increased focus on strategic CSR impacted on the company's security arrangements in the sense that the security forces now received increased training in human rights issues. The movement Sarmiento describes is similar to a transition from Ferguson's (2005) 'colonial-era corporate paternalism' to a more strategic deployment of CSR recalling Welker's (2014) notion of 'the sustainable development model'. The colonial-era business was built on philanthropy and paternalism, similar to what Welker calls the corporate patronage model. Interestingly, the 'low profile' character of the US ownership model that Sarmiento describes fits Ferguson's definition of the enclave as a distanced and isolated fortress-like operation with little entanglement with the local society. In his analysis, this replaced the paternalistic model of the direct social engagements of the 'colonial era'. In the case of Cerrejón, however, this enclave-like character did not isolate the mine from the surrounding society but was maintained by a certain amount of kinship-making and 'philanthropy' (Sarmiento 2008:144): handing out gifts, providing immediate services and doing casual favors, as described in an earlier section.

The strategic use of CSR became part of the company's business model (Sarmiento 2008), and, I argue, was also integrated as a central element of corporate security work. While stating that social work (akin to 'soft' security) is now at the center of (formal) corporate security, the continued use of physical (or 'hard') security should not be dismissed. One tangible example of this is the fact that the military is hugely visible in the mining area. Every time I travelled to the area during fieldwork, I passed a military post and a police post.<sup>37</sup> The military base is located

interviewed her in 2018, where she repeated many of the conclusions of her 2008 paper referred to here.

<sup>36</sup> Then again, as Drummond is a family-owned company with little historical experience compared to Exxon, which is a huge shareholder company, there are great differences between the level of demand for accountability and transparency. A shareholder company is considered more 'socially sensitive' due to the constant monitoring of managers by shareholders (see also Sarmiento p. 145).

<sup>37</sup> Often, I was allowed to pass without stopping, but sometimes they stopped me, and I was asked where I was heading and why. The usual comment, after I had said I was going to visit some

between the fenced mining area and Cerrejón's privately owned road, which is also the main publicly used road between the towns of Albania and Maicao. There are also mobile military posts around the area. In 2018 and 2019, when two communities in particular started to mobilize resistance to the diversion of the Bruno stream, a military post was put up in front of the entrance to one of the communities. Community members felt certain that that was no coincidence, and that they had to live with the fact that they, as well as any potential guest of theirs, were being monitored (field notes, April 2019).



Military vehicles on the main road between Hatonuevo and Barrancas, close to the entrance to the Cerrejón mining complex. May 2019. Photo by the author.

Besides the continued military presence around the mine, there are other forms of surveillance, such as that conducted by the company's complaints office. Its employees, whom I interviewed in the office, did not, however, call it surveillance, but instead more or less a systematic registering of complaints, which was obviously part of their job description. Besides receiving complaints from neighboring communities, they also do more detective work, such as following people on social media. They explained this as follows: 'A complaint can also be something that is formulated on Facebook. If it is something about Cerrejón, and especially if it happens in a neighboring community, then we register it because we have to know all those kinds of things' (personal communication, April 2019). The significance of this new platform for doing covert corporate intelligence still seems to have been underestimated in research on corporate power and the governance of dissent (one exception is Lubbers 2015). The interesting point here

acquaintances, was something like "take care, then", indicating the risk I was running being a female foreigner in La Guajira.

is how employees frame this as part of their job, which is to be on top of things and show awareness. That was also their reasoning behind setting up a WhatsApp line with the communities, down which people can send their complaints without incurring any costs. The complaints office's employees explained that this direct line of communication works as 'an alternative mechanism: the principle is that they cannot have costs when they are making a complaint, so when they call us, we go to their place' (personal communication, April 2019). The reason the complaints office exists is largely to mitigate unrest and dissent, but I see these concrete methods walking a fine line between standardized corporate overt monitoring and the covert surveillance of possible dissenters.

Lastly, another, more violent expression of the management of dissent is the persecution of activists. One example is what people call *terceros*, 'third parties' who visit people in their homes as though they were distant relatives or acquaintances, try to make deals with people, make them comply or threaten them (in a friendly way) to keep silent on specific matters. Another example is the continued death threats that people receive, often through pamphlets circulating around the person's home, on social media and around town. One Wayúu leader claimed, '[i]f we criticize, we appear on those pamphlets. Those who are defending water, criticizing the mine, doing a civic roadblock etc. That is the state's way of oppressing us. We are called guerrillos' (personal conversation, March 2019). These more informal ways of managing resistance normally lack the name of a sender or are signed *Aguilas Negras*, an unidentified group with ties to earlier paramilitary groups. There is no actual evidence that either the *terceros* or the pamphlets are sent by Cerrejón (or the state, for that matter), even though many locals believe they are. Nonetheless the measures have the ability to subdue and silence people. While the company officially denies involvement in all such events (e.g. Cerrejon et al. 2018), I believe we should still understand them as part of the broader security practices around extractive spaces today. As already suggested, this is the glue of dispersed (informal) elements that makes the dots work together so that corporate security comes together in a certain way.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has shown how the becoming of coal-mining to La Guajira is also a story of the becoming of extractive corporate security practices. Early corporate practices were based on kinship-making as a way of engineering consent among the local population, since their compliance was needed in order for the bulldozer and other engineering equipment to make way for the mine and its infrastructure. After describing the quest for civilization and the strategies used in acquiring the land, the chapter demonstrates the reverse logics of the security design of Cerrejón from a historical perspective. The paper also illustrates and underlines the fundamental argument that hard and soft security practices continually go hand in hand. The practices of corporate security are ever-changing, what is at the forefront and what is working in the background differing according to time,

space and circumstances. This historical enquiry has provided an in-depth illustration of how earlier practices were less organized around the notion of a standardized CSR and sustainable development, though they were still based on soft technologies such as making kinship and gift-giving. The paper then showed that, with the emergence of a paradigm of CSR and international standards, corporate security was transformed from having physical security at its core to placing social work and relationship-building at the center of its work. As the transformation from an overall focus on physical security to the increased use of social technologies in security work is a development that goes hand in hand with an increased focus on CSR, harder forms of security have been outsourced and camouflaged by the strategic promotion of social projects, housing, health services and education. At the same time, the paper shows how informal security in the shadows, largely based on threats of death, still provides protection to extractive sites.

Along with the increased use of soft technologies as security practices, the paper shows how formal public security, contracted private security and informal security in the shadows all provide protection for extractive sites today. What differs, according to the contextual and temporal situation, is what is to the fore and what is behind, what is formalized and what is hidden.

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