

Workshop UCL/GHIL

**From local Night Watchmen towards a global Security Market?  
Inter- and Transnational Perspectives on the History of the Private Security Industry  
since the 19th century in Europe and beyond**

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So far, a global, trans- or international history of the private security sector has been a desideratum. This notoriously controversial commercial field emerged in the USA in the mid-19th century and increasingly spread to the UK as well as continental Europe from the turn of the century onwards. The business model consisted (and still consists in large part) of providing, for a fee, technical devices (such as locks, safes and intruder alarms) and/or uniformed (sometimes also armed) staff to guard public buildings or private property against criminal attack. There followed the commercialisation and professionalisation of this business model in distinction to older forms of security hardware, private guarding (like militias or vigilantes) or mercenarism - especially through corporate organisation, extended (price) competition, product/service innovation and commercial advertising. This ultimately led to the formation of a new capitalist-commercial branch of the economy, and associated corporate structures and institutions, described by social or political science researchers as the "security industry" with its own "security markets" spreading around the globe in different waves or phases (like in the 1900s, the 1920s, the 1970s, the 2000s after 9/11).

However, there has been a considerable lack of historical-comparative studies, grounded in original or archival source materials, which have addressed the long-term development of private security providers vis-à-vis police-state regulation efforts, public media discussions and social or individual receptions. This parallels the shortage of original, long-term historical research on "hybrid" forms of security production and distributions (like neighbourhood watches or self-defence practices). This workshop therefore aims to pose fundamental questions about international comparison, transnational linkages as well as mutual observations and different perceptions of the private security sector since the 19th century, including by pooling perspectives from beyond the Euro-Atlantic area. Various case studies will be used to address the private security industry at four analytical levels:

1. On a *macro level*, the question of overarching security policies, cultures and societal discourses about the role of private security services, especially in the area of tension between the state monopoly on the use of force (enacted by the military or police) established during the 19th century.
2. On a *meso level*, the changing patterns of relationships between the emerging companies and associations (competition vs. cooperation) in the security industry.

Equally, the interrelationship between the private security sector, the state and voluntary attempts at regulation, including hybrid, non-commercial and other non-state actors or forms of security production (such as vigilantes, militias, volunteer watches, self-defence).

3. On a *micro-level*, the everyday practices of security companies and their employees, with a focus on product design, recruitment, training and equipment, as well as the deployment of security guards and technologies and their encounters (and conflicts) on the ground. This is especially interesting in terms of different social groups interacting with each other (for example with low-paid guards protecting the property of wealthy customers or male security staff guarding females against male violence etc.).

4. On a *meta-level*, the possible points of connection to methodological-theoretical discussions on relevant themes, for example on questions of globality/local settings, capitalism/statehood, violence/protection, risk/fear, security/danger or property/poverty; thus, broader (and often abstract) themes of distinctive power-relations, actors, agencies and perceptions in different spaces can be empirically addressed with the gender, race and class relations linked to them.

These four different dimensions are to be examined and discussed comparatively in terms of their global, transnational, national, regional or local embedding in their historical dynamics, especially with a view to overarching political, economic, social or cultural changes or caesurae in the various nation states and societies since the 19th century. Can an inter- or transnational comparative analysis of private security actors or services provide insights into higher-level questions about state order, property relations, gender roles, racial or social inequalities? Can specific national “security cultures” be distinguished from one another - especially with regard to the often controversial private “security industry”? Are such national approaches being transformed by entrepreneurial processes of transnationalisation or globalisation in the late 20th and early 21st centuries?