



Normalising corporate counterinsurgency: Engineering consent, managing resistance and greening destruction around the Hambach coal mine and beyond



Andrea Brock ^{a,*}, Alexander Dunlap ^b

^a Department of International Relations, Centre for Global Political Economy and STEPS Centre, University of Sussex, UK

^b Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 10 March 2017

Received in revised form

29 September 2017

Accepted 30 September 2017

Keywords:

Coal mining

Resistance

Germany

Counterinsurgency

Corporate social responsibility

Offsetting

ABSTRACT

The German Rhineland is home to the world's largest opencast lignite coal mine and human-made hole – the Hambach mine. Over the last seven years, RWE, the mine operator, has faced an increase in militant resistance, culminating in the occupation of the Hambacher Forest and acts of civil disobedience and sabotage. The mine provides a European case study to examine the repressive techniques deployed by RWE to legitimise coal mining in the face of a determined opposition. Drawing on political ecology literature and work on corporate counter-movements, this paper peers into extractive industries and their corporate social responsibility (CSR) engagements through the lens of corporate counterinsurgency. We first provide some background to the mine and RWE's unique position in the German political economy. After explaining the rise of resistance, the paper then discusses counterinsurgency in relation to CSR by outlining the different techniques used to win the 'hearts' and 'minds' of people around the mine. This includes securing the support of political leaders, lobbying, involvement in social events, infrastructure projects, astroturf groups and ecological restoration/offsetting work, which combine with overtly repressive techniques by public and private security forces that together attempt to legitimise the mine and stigmatise, intimidate and criminalise activists. This paper contends that counterinsurgency techniques are becoming normalised into the everyday operations of RWE, naturalising its image as 'good corporate citizen' and legitimising and invisibilising the violence towards (non)human nature inherent in the corporate-state-mining-complex, as mining is becoming part of the 'green economy' and made 'sustainable'.

© 2017 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

The German state of North Rhine Westphalia (NRW) is home to the largest lignite coal deposit (55 billion tons) in Europe. The Hambach mine—one of three lignite mines in the region and operated by RWE, Germany's leading electricity provider—is the world's largest opencast lignite mine (Schmitz, 2006) and Europe's 'biggest hole' (Michel, 2005: 16). The *Hambacher Forest*, a highly biodiverse old-growth forest, is currently being cleared to give way to the expansion, or, in the words of RWE, the 'migration' of the Hambach mine (Fig. 1). The displacement and resettlements of homes, air pollution and environmental destruction necessary for

the 'migrating mine' has triggered resistance, beginning in the 1970s and continuing into the present – with citizen initiatives, mass-protests and a forest occupation attempting to block the expansion of the mine. Environmental activists initiated a campaign against RWE's three coal mines in the Rhineland, with annual climate camps and mass-civil disobedience since 2010. Others engage in human chains, demonstrations art performances, nature walks and legal battles against RWE.

In April 2012, forest defenders occupied the neighbouring *Hambacher forest* to stop the migrating mine. In November, over a four-day period, they were forcefully removed by over 500 police officers in what is alleged to be one of the most expensive evictions in German police history according to interviewees. Following the eviction, a local resident bought land next to the forest to host a permanent protest camp. Shortly thereafter, the *Hambacher Forest* was reoccupied, and now serves as a permanent point of resistance

* Corresponding author. Department of International Relations, Centre for Global Political Economy and STEPS Centre, University of Sussex, UK.

E-mail addresses: a.brock@sussex.ac.uk (A. Brock), a.d.dunlap@vu.nl (A. Dunlap).



Fig. 1. The migrating mine, Perschke, 2012.

against the mine. Forest defenders began living in tree houses to protect the forest, while working to stop the migrating mine, through road barricades, tree platforms, tree-spiking and the placement of 'potential improvised explosive devices';¹ sabotage of coal-transportation infrastructure (i.e. short circuiting power lines, burning of pumping stations, radio-masts and electrical transformers) and the ambushing of security-police patrols with stones, slingshots, fireworks and Molotov cocktails (Anonymous, 2016: 91). At present, the encampment has been evicted (and reoccupied) three times, with repeated reports of violent repression and even claims of attempted vehicle manslaughter by RWE security in January 2016² (Schönberg, 2016). Militant and peaceful protests actions have been met with increasing repression by security and police personnel. This violent repression, however, complements a diversity of indirect corporate strategies to secure acceptance of, and pacify resistance against the mine, including sustained 'greening' activities, public relations campaigns and corporate social responsibility measures that RWE has engaged in for decades.

Contributing to the growing political ecology literature of the Global North (e.g. Schröder et al., 2006), the Hambach mine conflict provides a European case study examining the repressive techniques and 'corporate social technologies' (Rogers, 2012: 284) undertaken by RWE to reshape the politics, social relations and conceptions of 'nature' within communities to maintain operational legitimacy in the face of ecological crises, anthropogenic climate change and determined opposition. Following the RAND Corporation's National Security Division (Rosenau et al., 2009: 1), we conceptualise these techniques and technologies as 'corporate counterinsurgency; ' defined as 'firms' efforts to mitigate violence and promote stability through social development and security measures' to 'win hearts and minds' of local populations. We argue that these counterinsurgency techniques are composed of 'soft' and 'hard' tactics (Dunlap & Fairhead, 2014; Williams, 2007/2004), which need to be analysed in conjuncture, to illustrate how the former serve to invisibilise the latter. This approach allows us to

approach the often invisibilised and normalised violence inherent in coal mining and industrial growth to further explore the conflictive political geography of the migrating mine (Benjaminsen et al., 2017).

Whereas conventional wisdom tends to point towards militarisation and 'hard' approaches, we recognise the proliferation and corporate adaptation of civil-military (counterinsurgency) techniques – integrating greening, social development and corporate communication with more repressive measures – in their respective contexts to respond to opposition. 'One of the defining features of contemporary [mining] capitalism,' Stuart Kirsch (2010) has argued in his seminal work on 'sustainable mining,' 'is the way corporations respond to their critics' – co-opting and integrating their discourses without changing their operations. It is from this perspective of counterinsurgency that we analyse the operations of RWE around the Hambach Forest and beyond.

This paper proceeds, firstly, by introducing the employed conceptual and methodological approach, and by providing some background on RWE, the Hambach mine and their political activities – from EU lobbying to collaboration with municipal politicians. We then move to analyse the 'engineering of consent' through examining the multiple 'soft' counterinsurgency techniques that heavily rely on public relations (PR) strategies, 'neoliberal social development' and 'greening.' Subsequently, we examine the way nature restoration and offsetting legitimises RWE's operations, and, in conjunction with other techniques, fashions RWE as a 'good corporate citizen.' This is followed by an analysis of RWE's 'harder' counterinsurgency techniques which involve the criminalisation, repression and violence against forest defenders. We conclude that by entrenching state/corporate power and violence, an integrated approach involving hard *and* soft counterinsurgency techniques further intensifies the current trajectory of industrial progress responsible for biodiversity loss and climate crisis.

2. Counterinsurgency and extractivism: approaching the forest

Peering into extractive industries through the lens of

¹ Fake devices to keep police and security personnel out of the forest.

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_blumIDgAY.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5118417>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5118417>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)