

GLOBAL VIGILANTES

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editors

Global Vigilantes

Perspectives on Justice and Violence

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Foreword

GLOBAL VIGILANTES: PERSPECTIVES
ON JUSTICE AND VIOLENCE¹

Atreyee Sen and David Pratten

Vigilantism is global: ‘South African vigilantes fill police gap’, ‘N. Ireland’s ‘alternative police forces’, ‘Nepal’s rising vigilante violence’, ‘Nigerians turn to vigilantes’, ‘Australian ‘vigilantes’ plan coastal patrols’, ‘Mob justice in rural Guatemala’, ‘Vigilantes set for Mexico border patrol’. Contemporary news headlines are replete with accounts of global vigilantism. The stories these headlines report capture a broad range of incidents and processes in which ordinary folk have taken the law into their own hands to prevent theft and crime, insurgency and immigration. These stories speak to some of the key themes of this volume. Whether as localized self-policing of crime and culture, or as trans-local surveillance of trafficking and terrorism, vigilante movements and ideologies have widespread appeal in many parts of the world. But can a link be drawn between the apparent proliferation of vigilantism and the dynamics of globalization with its associated forces of political and economic liberalization?

Vigilantism has yet to be framed within understandings of the dynamics and meanings of globalization, or the localized discourses on global terrorism. The aim of this book is to draw into focus a range of judicial and violent social practices that are linked to concepts of vigilantism and which operate within, and are articulated to, a shift-

¹ This volume arises from the proceedings of a workshop, ‘Global Vigilantes’ held at the University of Sussex on 8-9 July 2005. We would like to thank all of the participants for their contributions and the Wenner Gren Foundation and The British Academy for their generous support.

ing global political economy. Rather than presenting a set of papers recounting instances of the same narrowly defined form of vigilantism in different parts of the world, the emphasis here is on the forms that vigilante-style justice and violence take in a contemporary global context. The aim then is to reach an understanding of the complexity of vigilante dynamics in a context of increasingly polarized global rhetorics of security and insecurity, order and disorder.

From a global perspective the relationship between vigilantism and globalization would appear almost self-evident. Seen on a macro scale the global political order wrought by neoliberalism has created unparalleled opportunities and motives for citizens to take the law into their own hands. If the politics of deregulation, the franchising of sovereignty, and the 'privatization of indirect government' are the signature features of the current international economic regime, then vigilantism is both a logical response and an integral aspect. The appropriation of sovereignty from the state, through privatization on the one hand and seizure on the other, may therefore be seen as a reflex of globalization and neoliberalism.

Globally policing has 'entered a new era, an era characterized by a transformation in the governance of security.'² This new paradigm of privatized and decentralized policing contradicts our common understanding of the state's provision of security, its monopoly of force, as the essential function of government. As policing is restructured even distinctions of private and public, centralized and decentralized become problematic, since contemporary trends separate the authorization of security and the activity of policing.³ Is it 'private' or 'public' policing when a government legislates to authorize village defence forces or to sponsor vigilante groups; is it 'private policing' or 'local government' when communities grasp opportunities within the law to organize their own protection even though they are not explicitly authorized to do so? These dichotomies are collapsing in part because governments in recent years have facilitated, encouraged and

² Bayley and Shearing, 2001 p.1.

³ Ibid. p.5.

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required non-state groups to assume policing activity through the creation of legal opportunity, by outsourcing, and by supporting the community policing movement of the 1980s and 1990s.

'Rather than being passive consumers of police services,' Johnston suggests that citizens 'engage in a variety of productive security activities'.⁴ Analysts of policing and security around the world now speak of complex patterns of 'overlapping agencies',⁵ of 'plural networked policing',⁶ and no longer accept the conceptual priority of the state in these new security networks. Increasingly questions of accountability and legitimacy in policing are less important than 'what is available', 'what works best', and 'what can I afford'.⁷ Vigilantism is a cheap form of law enforcement.

Neoliberalism's effects on criminal justice are felt on a global scale. The free-market doctrine precludes the need for programmes of social justice and welfare. The resulting social fragmentation creates uncertainty and rootlessness and alienates categories of the vulnerable—the deskilled, the part-time, immigrants and unemployed—who occupy a 'carcereal social zone'. While governments are less able to effect social and economic outcomes within their own jurisdictions, privatization is rapidly becoming part of state repressive arsenals. Accounts of the privatization of national police forces abound. In China commentators write of the 'commodification of policing' as police have become private security companies wholly owned as subsidiaries of local ministries; in Poland police officers are ironically heralded as leaders in labour 'flexibility' since their services are open to the highest bidder; and in Brazil the continual circulation of personnel between private security, vigilante organizations and government agencies serves to disguise the perpetrators and victims of urban violence.

4 Johnston, 2001 p.965.

5 Baker, 2004.

6 Loader, 2000.

7 Baker, 2004

Commentators on globalization, indeed, argue that the negative side of the inexorable resource-hungry demands of neoliberalism is violence and conflict. There are those who link violence to globalization on other levels too. Appadurai, for instance, links violence to local logics of identity formation that have been distorted by the flows of images, capital and people circulating within the new global political geography.⁸ Precisely how the distortions introduced by diasporas into the large-scale identities produced by modern nation-states take place has occupied other scholars in their endeavour to determine a 'phenomenology of affect' in the analysis of collective violence.⁹

The consequence of globalization is not the disappearance of sovereign states, but their loss of leverage over economic life and a fragmentation of their control of organized violence. Deregulation and the privatization of violence are integral aspects of this process in which the line between licit and illicit business, law and lawlessness is increasingly finely drawn. Where regimes have conceded their monopoly on violence new cartographies of disorder have emerged. Bayley and Shearing argue that governments are not just devolving power in this manner, but 'accepting new bases of legitimate government.'¹⁰ Emerging forms of privatization of lawful violence are not automatically indicators of chaos either, as Mbembe reminds us. Rather, it is important to see them as struggles aimed at 'establishing new forms of legitimate domination and gradually restructuring formulas of authority built on other foundations.'¹¹ But what are these evolving formulas of authority, and can a direct link be drawn between the primacy of the market and the rise of private military, paramilitary and jurisdictional organizations?¹²

8 Appadurai, 1996 p.154.

9 Das and Kleinman, 2000.

10 Bayley and Shearing, 2001 p.8.

11 Mbembe, 2001 p.76.

12 Ibid. pp.78-9.

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Contemporary states across the globe confront a paradox. On the one hand states are saturated in self-imaginings grounded in the law. New geographies of production have generated new heterodoxies for which legislation, constitutions and new cultures of legality are seen as the universalizing levelling counterpoints. On the other hand, we witness the deregulation and decentralization of the law predicated on the ideology and practice of 'outsourcing' life services to the market and to volunteers. The interstices of these parallel movements—legal fetishization and formal outsourcing - are pregnant with creative possibilities. This twilight space accommodates a 'culture of productive deception' and an elision of the law and lawlessness. Betwixt and between an alternative citizenry 'stands in' for the state, conversant in 'languages of stateness', and able to represent the state precisely because it moves with impunity between appeals to the form of law and forms of extra-judicial practice that are clearly construed as lying outside or prior to the state.¹³

The link between vigilantism and globalization is a powerful argument then, but only a partial one. From above, on a macro scale, private security and vigilantism can look like a reflex of wider, global discourses and dynamics. From below, however, the reflex link is much harder and more complex to delineate since vigilantism obeys not only the logics of neoliberalism but its own historical and cultural logics. The chapters of this volume do not contest the salience and insight of the macro perspective in examining the fault-lines and features of globalized inequalities. Political and economic shifts in the light of the new mobilities of capital and population have produced resonances within vigilante activity. In post-Soviet Russia, or Bolivia after the neoliberal reform package, opportunities are derived from state deregulation and states of mind of volunteer activism. Yet even in these situations it is clear that long historical trajectories, and particular cultural repertoires, are the proximate and pressing imperatives behind vigilante violence. Indeed, what the papers collected here contest is the explanatory potential of a perspective that

¹³ Das and Poole, 2004.

emphasizes the link between globalization and vigilantism in illuminating vigilantism's modes and meanings, or its imperatives and legitimacy.

This collection brings together scholars who share a concern with investigating the localized meanings and imperatives of vigilantism and a methodology which focuses on an examination of the 'theoretical nature, everyday popular uses, public discourses and empirical reality of vigilantism'.¹⁴ Hence, it is necessary to explore vigilantism as practice rather than as an object of analysis with clear-cut conceptual and empirical boundaries. In this sense these papers move beyond an argument that vigilantism is straightforwardly a popular response to the vacuum left by state collapse, failure or instrumentalized disorder. Here, as elsewhere, vigilantism 'cannot be reduced to either expressions of the mob or to mere antidotes to formal law'.¹⁵ Elements of this thesis appear in each paper, of course, and each contributor is emphatic in claiming that police resourcing and corruption contribute materially to the emergence and continuing legitimacy of vigilantes.

Nevertheless, the papers collected here present an alternative perspective, one that sees vigilantism from within localized cultural and historical frameworks, and in which vigilantes are seen within a range of 'longstanding ethics and practices concerned with the protection of their communities'.¹⁶ Each of the chapters examines the ways in which historical registers of justice and violence are inflected in contemporary practice. As Whitehead insists, 'Why we should choose to be violent, or how we can be induced to act violently will obviously differ culturally and historically'.¹⁷ Non-state or self policing has a very long historical trajectory to which the history of state policing, not just state failures, has contributed in large measure. As Baker argues with regard to Africa, decades of 'autocratic predation

14 Buur and Jensen, 2004 p.140.

15 Ibid.

16 Leach, 2004 p.ix.

17 Whitehead, 2005 pp.55-56.

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with little concern for legality or Socialist leadership in which law served the interests of the state provoked alienation from the official law and the development of informal legal orders...¹⁸

Diffused in crowds and mobs and concentrated in groups and gangs, 'popular' violence tends to obey moral imperatives and is often structured in terms of 'legitimate' targets and appropriate punishments. It is important to account for the different moral and aesthetic evaluations people in different contexts make of their actions on the bodies of others.¹⁹ These various moral communities produce notions of justice and law with different kinds of imaginaries from those available in the official sites and representations of justice and law.²⁰ In her comparative evaluation, Martha Huggins notes that vigilantism in Latin America is 'essentially conservative or reactionary: It represents demands for return to a real or idealized social past, whether or not that vision of the past actually serves wider social good, or even the interests of the vigilantes themselves.'²¹ Indeed, views of justice captured by vigilantes are often 'retrospective vision[s] of a world restored to its proper order',²² but this is not to say that they are based on unchanging notions of cultural norms and practice. Rather, the complexity of lived experience inflects both past and imagined futures into an ambiguous, dynamic and very powerful notion of the moral order and of the routines by which it should be upheld.

The definitional issues surrounding vigilantism are many and varied. These persistent questions concern matters of scale, of ethics, and of state complicity among others. These issues raise significant problems in the study of vigilantism. How significant is the organization of violence? Are there analytical distinctions to be drawn between the violence of vigilante organizations and lynch mobs, for instance?

18 Baker, 2004 p.166.

19 Spencer, 2003 p.1568.

20 Das and Poole, 2004 p.22.

21 Huggins, 1991 p.5.

22 Spencer, 2003 p.1570.

Does paying for protection voluntarily or under duress undermine a vigilante ethic? And what does it mean when the state authorizes the use of non-state violence? Many of the chapters deal with organisations whose members call themselves vigilantes. Others, however, refer to militia, military, paramilitary, lynch mobs, street gangs and private security firms. In retaining flexibility in our own definitions it is equally necessary to account for the ways in which the labelling of vigilantism itself contains a politics of language, and language is employed to legitimate or oppose vigilante activity.

The chapters are organized around four inter-related themes: 'boundaries and belonging', which focus on the ideologies associated with vigilante practice; 'personhood and punishment', which highlights the significance of conceptions of deviance and inscriptions of embodied violence; 'protection and politics', which reassesses the relationship between vigilantes and state institutions; and 'transitions and trajectories', which explores the historical inflections and institutional pathways of vigilante groups and practices.

Ideologies of vigilantism

As Mary Douglas emphasized, '... all margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that the shape of fundamental experience is altered. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins.'²³ The volume examines the ways in which vigilante groups and ideologies produce and reproduce themselves within shifting climates of hate and fear to patrol and police borders of belonging, of citizenship, and of constituency. These papers ask to what extent the content of an ideology is important to vigilante practice, and whether the boundary-making function of community inclusion and exclusion is the determinant factor. The language of justice and morality by which community boundaries are constructed, and in which vigilantism is cloaked and legitimated, is often presented as an unproblematic

²³ Douglas, 2002 p.145.

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given. The ethnographic insights from these papers, however, illustrate that this is a complex and contested terrain.

Boundaries are of central importance to the Minuteman Project on the US-Mexico border in Tombstone, Arizona, which Leo Chavez links to a sense of frustration with new global realities that reduced the power of national borders to delimit the nation state as an autonomous territory. Chavez locates the Minutemen within the history of media discourse on the US-Mexico border. History is key to this spectacle of borderland 'theatre' since the Minuteman label recalls vigilantes of an earlier era and draws to itself the legitimacy of those who would build and shape the nation. Here vigilantes attempted to signal the ways in which a border zone was historically configured as a place of danger, how illegal Mexican immigration was represented within a symbolic opposition of citizen versus enemy, and how citizenship and sovereignty might be re-enacted in a rite of policing non-citizens.

In contrast to this definition of a hierarchy of citizenship defined through vigilantism, Steffen Jensen shows how in South Africa intra-community boundaries configured along the lines of emergent inter-generational tensions are shaped by vigilantism. Everyday policing in Nkomazi sees elders distinguish their authority on the basis of property and tradition, while young men draw on the historical legitimacy of the 1980s anti-apartheid movement. Here elders police sexuality, drunkenness and theft in their confrontations with young men, while they confront their elders through accusations of witchcraft and mob violence. The definition of crime in the context of Nkomazi has therefore become a shifting signifier that defines boundaries of a moral community. Moral transgressions, Jensen argues, are not just infractions of legal codes, which are themselves unstable, but we are urged rather to identify who defines these codes and on what basis of authority.

In her chapter on the Hindu nationalist strategies of the Shiv Sena women's wing in India, Atreyee Sen pursues Kathleen Blee's

pioneering work on the role of women, not as a passive legitimating force, but as active agents and ‘sentinels’ of vigilante movements.²⁴ Sen’s study shows that Hindu nationalism in its violent opposition to Muslim communities can only be seen as a partial explanation for the popularity and legitimacy of the Aghadi women’s movement. As important is the protection and retribution, the material and economic security these groups provide for women negotiating a new flexibility and autonomy within the home, in the workplace and in public spaces. Vigilantism in this context is directed against both Muslims and men, and like Blee, Sen argues that while the Shiv Sena movement as a whole is conservative and reactionary it nevertheless offers women a space to articulate progressive views and practices on gender roles.

While Sen’s case study illustrates how a Muslim ‘other’ serves to delineate the struggles of an imagined Hindu nation, so Conerly Casey’s chapter shows how vigilantism has been a central aspect of the renewal and reform of ‘affective citizenship’ for Muslim communities in northern Nigeria. Within a historical framing of emergent cultures of surveillance in the city of Kano, which inflect a global Muslim protest against recent Israeli and US policies, Casey discusses how reformist projects by the Hausa Ulama promoted an autochthonous, ethnic and religious exclusion backed by the often violent ‘policing’ of street gangs (*yan daba*) and *sharia* implementation brigades (*yan hisba*). As part of a process in which Nigerian vigilante movements have refracted geographical affiliation, language, ethnicity and religion into ‘fetishized cultural codes of belonging’, Casey argues that in stratifying citizenship between Muslims, non-reformist Muslims and non-Muslims, vigilantes pursued an imperative to clarify and purify the blurred boundaries of the contemporary Nigerian state.

Each of these examples therefore provides localized and historicized reflection on Appadurai’s observation that where the lived experience of ‘large labels’ becomes unstable, indeterminate and socially volatile, violent action can become one means of satisfying

²⁴ Blee, 1991; Blee, 2002.

one's sense of one's categorical self.²⁵ It is to definitions of self and other, configured through ontologies and practices of personhood that subsequent chapters turn.

Deviant categories and registers of justice

Vigilantes perform exemplary acts of violence in order to make and mark community boundaries. The semiotic potential of violence makes it a powerful signifier in this situation. It is imperative therefore to understand the cultural construction of violence given the violent construction of community that appears in so many of the settings described in the following chapters. To what extent does violence, day-to-day violence, become central to the moral order? Does violence orient norms and normality? To what extent are identities recovered through violence? Violence is generative of worlds and structures of meanings. Daniel, for instance, has encouraged us to perceive violence not as an end point to be explained but as a productive starting point.²⁶

In this light it is important to examine the persistence of ontological frameworks, or what Sen, after de Certeau, refers to as the 'tenacity of ethics' in explaining the repertoires of violence, the improvised procedures of justice, and the oppositional categories that are embedded in vigilante practice. Here categorical distinctions are inscribed in punishment on the body as a primary site representing parameters of otherness, and violent closure.²⁷ These chapters each point to the various registers of personhood upon which identities of vigilante and perpetrator are configured.

In his analysis of the Amadlozi vigilante group in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, Lars Buur argues that citizenship should be seen not as a status but as a process in which vigilante justice performs a powerful defining role. In holding informal tribunals Amadlozi 'take re-

25 Appadurai, 1998.

26 Daniel, 1996.

27 Appadurai, 1998 p.193.

sponsibility', as they put it, for domestic abuse and a range of crimes and misdemeanours. Their findings are based on seeking consensus from the community at large and their verdicts and punishments are delivered as the accused stands in what Buur refers to as the 'space for transformation'. It is in this context that personhood is not conceived *a priori* but is fluctuating and contingent, and Amadlozi punishment can radically reorder the status of persons by 'transforming' them as moral beings to rejoin their family and normal reproductive relations or stripping them of their relational identities and expelling them as outlaws. Buur's argument then shows that by abjecting and dehumanizing criminals the Amadlozi operate within alternative ontologies of personhood that undermine South Africa's constitutional conception of universal citizenship and autonomous individuals.

This theme of the seizure of 'popular sovereignty', based on the social and symbolic construction of insiders and outsiders, is pursued in Tobias Kelly's chapter which emphasizes the significance of oppositions between 'martyr' and 'collaborator' in the context of the Palestinian *intifadas*. Here claims to rule in the name of 'the people' are made tangible through the taking of life. Palestinian collaborators with the Israeli security forces are configured within a concept of *jawasis* connoting the corruption and moral weakness of a distorted self, which contrasts with the nation-building concept of *shahid*, martyrdom. In tracing the shifting trajectory of these concepts in the highly contested sphere of the West Bank, Kelly, informed by Benjamin's theoretical insights on law-making and law-preserving violence, shows that the execution of collaborators serves to conserve popular claims to authority at the same time as producing a new moral and political order.

This conception of the imperatives of vigilante violence does not concern state failure so much as the construction of abject bodies beyond reform. David Pratten similarly argues for the historically contingent and culturally specific logics that being a vigilante means, and how that is contrasted with conceptions of thieves in Annang

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villages in Nigeria. In this context vigilante practices are shaped by the representation of deviant types in terms of a moral evaluation of character often seen as a set of dispositional attributes that are 'inherent, unalterable and irremedial'.²⁸ Inflections of the aesthetics and politics of former traditions not only shape the mode of contemporary Annang vigilantism but also provide its imperative for violence, since the thief is conceived in embodied and discursive practices analogous to familiar representations of malevolent, non-human ancestral spirits.

The importance of tacit cultural codes to define and punish deviants is stressed in Rosellen Roche's analysis of punishment beatings in Northern Ireland. Set against new demographic and cultural shifts in the post-ceasefire era, Roche provides a visceral account of the experience of beatings and community policing among young people from both Republican and Loyalist communities who find themselves identified as joy-riders and drug-takers by former paramilitaries. Mediated by the proximity and density of social relations, codes of warnings, weapons and restraints on violence are shared across the religious and political divides. Hence, as distinct from hired, privatized security, objections to excess violence are tempered by a network of familiarity and tacit support.

States and sovereignty

It seems clear that contemporary vigilantism relates both to the fragmentation of the sovereignty of nation-states and to the dependence that states have on the vigilance of their citizens. Recent ethnographic evidence decentres our understanding of the state and the relationship between vigilantes and state institutions. As Das and Kleinman have argued, 'Although many have theorized that this is the era of declining states... there are ... contradictory aspects in which the state is encountered in the context of violence.'²⁹ One of these key

28 Heald, 1986 p.76.

29 Das and Kleinman, 2000 p.6.

contexts has been vigilantism. In contemporary Iranian politics, for example, vigilantes are known as pressure groups (*gurub-i fīshar*) and act on behalf of hard-line factions using violence, intimidation and assassination to affect government policy.³⁰ Since the 1997 election of President Khatami's government, therefore, conservative sponsors of these groups have been able to forestall any internal reform or external rapprochement.

The papers here point emphatically to the enmeshing, complicity and mutual encompassment that vigilantism generates. Edmund Leach, of course, pointed us to consider the continuities between the state and criminal enterprise, showing that history provides many examples of how 'legitimate' actions of the state become the 'criminal' actions of the enemy, and as Taussig suggests, 'There is something insufferably attractive about the margin of law where the state re-creates the very terror it is meant to combat.'³¹ These transitions and transgressions are examined throughout these chapters.

Lynchings, Daniel Goldstein argues, represent a 'privatization' of justice that incorporates the organizational and cultural logics of neo-liberal, transnational capitalism which has saturated the Bolivian political economy and public culture. A continuum of violence emerges, he argues, which links the deficiencies of the neoliberal state to the cultural logics of privatization, flexibility and self-help in which citizen groups are urged to shoulder responsibility for the administration of justice. It is no accident, Goldstein observes, that the upsurge in the number of lynchings in Bolivia in 2000 coincided with a wave of popular discontent with the introduction of neoliberal structural reforms which included drastic cuts in police budgets.

Parallel dynamics in post-Soviet Russia have witnessed a long-standing tradition of *samosud* vigilantism sublimated into what Mark Galleoti describes as a 'more pernicious compound' linked to the market economy. With the rapid growth of the Russian private security industry (currently 40 per cent annually) both the police and the pri-

30 Rubin, 2001.

31 Taussig, 2003.

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vate sector provide protection, *krishba* (a roof), at a price. In this context private hiring of serving law enforcement officers, and the formation of sections of the police precisely to service private leasing arrangements, take police away from their duties at a time when they are most sorely needed. New forms of 'outsourced vigilantism' are no longer personal, redemptive or reintegrating. Rather, citizens are faced with making a cost-benefit analysis of security provision in which the state's legitimacy depends on it competing effectively with the private sector.

Alpa Shah's chapter illustrates the importance of retaining flexibility in our definitions of vigilantism. Her account of the Maoist Communist Centre, a modern incarnation of the Naxalite peasant and worker uprising of the late 1960s which has been labelled as a terrorist group by the Indian state since 2001, demonstrates how a militia movement incorporates both informal policing of public morality and protection rackets for local elites. The Marxist-Leninist pro-poor ideological trajectory of the movement is subsumed, Shah suggests, in favour of the policing of middle-class sensibilities (with regard to alcohol and adultery) and for gaining access to state resources. By seeking to control a 'market of protection' the MCC contributes to a climate of fear that is productive of new relationships and obligations that require us to recognize the mutually beneficial co-existence and dependence of protector and protected.

In a review of vigilantism in South Africa, Burr and Jensen conclude that 'The first thing that becomes evident ... is that vigilantes do more than simply substitute for the functions of the state.'³² These chapters illustrate, nevertheless, that justice at the margins of the state is not simply a matter of 'folk' notions of law and justice versus state sanctioned ideas of justice. Though they are locked in unequal relations, they are enmeshed in one another.³³ What these cases illustrate, then, is that vigilantism does not solely involve the desperate falling back on people's own physical resources in the face of state failure, but a more

³² Burr and Jensen, 2004.

³³ Das and Poole, 2004 p.21.

complicated process in which the state becomes one of a range of options which citizens can purchase.

Vigilantes in transition

It is often asserted that crime and disorder are related to transitions within political systems—from authoritarianism to democracy, from military to civilian rule, from communist regime to market economy, or from civil war to peace.³⁴ This assertion applies equally to the role of vigilantism. With the constraints on post-transition states in delivering justice communities will seek alternative forms of protection. The relationship between crime, vigilantism and political transition, however, is a complex one and one that is difficult to prove. Comparative evidence is therefore limited, but nevertheless points to the importance of ruptures and disruptions in social organization and crime control as the most pressing causes of crime and vigilantism in transitional states.

Vigilante groups, as institutions, have their own historical trajectories too, and are likely, over time and as they develop control in a particular locale, to become involved in a diverse range of activities including forms of illegal accumulation. What distinguishes long-running vigilante groups and practices from those that slip over into extortion and criminality themselves? Can the autonomy of vigilante groups be maintained over the long term or are scenarios of cooption or criminality inevitable? In the *rondas campesinas* ('peasants who make rounds') of Starn's eloquent ethnography, for example, nightwatches established by small numbers in 1983 to combat cattle rustling boasted universal able-bodied male membership within a year.³⁵ Emboldened by their success, the *rondas* soon established informal tribunals, *arreglos*, to settle disputes over land, water, debt, and wife beatings. By 1986 they had expanded into public works and mobilized in protests over interests rates. By the early 1990s Starn was moved to observe

34 Shaw, 2000.

35 Starn, 1999.

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that with thousands of *rondas campesinas* operating in Peru's northern Andes they had become 'one of the largest and most sustained rural movements in late twentieth century Latin America.'³⁶ As vanguards of alternative modes of political vision and identity, the trajectory of these groups encapsulated a new spirit of local cooperation and autonomy.

The vigilante trajectories related in this volume do not capture them as progressive reformists, however, but within more complex narratives. In the context of post-1994 Northern Ireland, for instance, Neil Jarman traces paramilitary trajectories from vigilantism to community policing, and from punitive to restorative justice. Restorative justice projects and community policing initiatives set up to monitor sectarian rioting and anti-social behaviour shed considerable light, he shows, on the contested fault-line between vigilantes' autonomy from the state and their accommodation within it. A British government report which suggested that these initiatives should engage formally with state probation and youth justice bodies in 2005, for instance, was met with political and media criticism for attempting to legitimize vigilante activity and modes of justice based on the threat of the use of paramilitary force.

These ambiguities of vigilante practices are also highlighted in Dennis Rodgers' study of *pandillerismo* (youth gangsterism) in a poor neighbourhood of Nicaragua's capital, Managua. In contrast to Jarman's account of the socially positive trajectories of paramilitarism, Rodgers identifies a dramatic shift in the role of gangs that were formed out of the demobilization of Contras and Sandinistas. During the 1990s gang membership became an index of community, and established localized but variable regimes of order within the wider conditions of insecurity in post-revolutionary Nicaragua. By 2002, however, with what Rodgers describes as the 'contingent compatibility' of gangs and drugs, and with an upsurge in cocaine trafficking and dealing, a gang which had protected and 'loved' its neighbourhood turned rapidly to prey upon it.

³⁶ Starn, 1992 p.90.

The effects of long-term militarization are a common theme in these contributions and inflections of violence associated with the civil war loom large in Guatemala. Jennifer Burrell and Gavin Weston, in their chapter on post-1996 lynching cases, contest an emerging consensus that these acts can be explained as a continuation of violence from the civil war or as fallings of a transitional judicial system. They argue for an ethnographic and micro-political perspective and for the need to examine more proximate factors in order to set lynchings against the specific local details of political contests and rumours. In this way, therefore, we see that there is no direct link to be made with the past; rather, there are ways in which vigilantism operates to discredit rival candidates in forthcoming elections, and articulate localized anxieties about wider forces of social change (*los cambios*).

These discourses on the continuities of violence in transition states are contrasted in Helen Maria Kyed's chapter with the role of vigilantes in securing a post-war settlement. Kyed argues that the state-franchising of vigilante patrols in Mozambique, along with the engagement of chiefs in new roles and responsibilities, represents not only a policy of decentralized self-policing at work, but also modes by which the Frelimo-led government is able to involve vigilantes and chiefs as 'collaborators' within new networks of surveillance over former opposition regions. International discourses of community policing are therefore articulated to the state-sponsorship of vigilante movements in former Renamo opposition strongholds, to define a conflation of criminals and Renamo supporters who are represented in opposition to new categories of affiliates to the Frelimo state. Hence, while it is commonly assumed that outsourcing weakens the state, Kyed examines ways in which vigilantism and popular justice are both implicated in the state's project and manufactures new modes of state allegiance.

Overall, as Ray Abrahams points out in his afterword, vigilantism connotes an unstable, labile and awkward borderland concept that is veiled in secrecy and serves as a cloak of deception. Rather than

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anticipate greater precision in our definition of vigilantism through comparative analysis, we argue that the comparative study of justice and violence illustrates the need to confront precisely these ambiguities with all their connotations and elisions. We share Abrahams' resistance to refocusing any definition onto those frequently recurring features of vigilante activity, since the chapters that follow illustrate that vigilantism is a shifting concept that articulates to ever-changing social realities.

While globalization shapes these new realities in significant ways, its logics do not provide a complete or satisfactory explanation for the questions raised by the contributors to this volume. The perspective on justice and violence that stresses a reflex link between globalization and vigilantism is critically over-determined. The effects of community policing reforms, of privatized security industries, and of state-sponsorship of vigilante groups are each mediated by localized cultural and historical repertoires. From these perspectives global vigilantes are shaped by the imperatives to define boundaries of belonging, by cultural templates of popular justice, by political and economic opportunity, and by institutional trajectories.



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