

**CfP: Online Workshop, VIGILANTISM RESURRECTED**  
**Anthropological Explorations of Violent Transfigurations of**  
**State, Crime and Politics across Contexts**

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Call for Papers

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**VIGILANTISM RESURRECTED**  
**Anthropological Explorations of Violent Transfigurations**  
**of State, Crime and Politics across Contexts**

**Workshop organised in collaboration with the EASA network: Anthropology**  
**of Crime and Criminalisation (*AnthroCrime*)**

May 20-22, 2021

Keynote Speech by Prof Jean Comaroff (Harvard University)

Across the globe, we are witnessing collective dissent against police violence and (abusive) state practices alongside a resurrection of vigilante activities, that is citizens' attempts to take law into their own hands to punish alleged criminals. While the perceived targets of these vigilante endeavors vary in different contexts – ranging from communities who are deemed illegal to those who are considered immoral-indecent and from those who slaughter cattle to elected members of parliaments – vigilante groups, by and large, act in defense of historically embedded structures and relations as well as moral orders.

While some scholarly explorations underline how vigilante groups strive to re-assert "law and order" independently of the state power (Johnston 1996; Moncada 2017), scholars often tend to associate vigilantism with the "dysfunctioning" societal orders and "failed" statehood of the non-western settings (Kučera and Mareš 2015). Critical anthropological approaches, on the other hand, demonstrate how the interrelationship between vigilante groups, statecraft, and the law may present a much more complicated picture that blurs the boundaries between crime and policing. These studies underline that vigilantism cannot be seen "just as a result of a state failure" (Arias 2013). Vigilantism, they show, does not solely emerge in the

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absence of an effective and non-corrupt judiciary and police structures, but may very well be incorporated into state security practices and frequently occurs in collusion with the state (Abrahams, 1998; Barker 2006; Buur, 2006; Goldstein, 2003; Schubert, 2013). Our research, similarly, indicates that vigilante violence may well augment and strengthen the state through its shouldering of stately responsibilities and (extralegal) violence against alleged criminals and the “enemies within.” Recent outbursts of vigilante violence in Russia, Latin America, India, Turkey, the UK, and the US, we argue, invite us to rethink its localized reconfigurations in relation to haunting legacies of colonialism, racism, economic inequalities, religious tensions, oppressive gendered structures, and post-Cold War polarizations.

Attending to the recent resurrection of vigilantism and its socio-political reverberations across the globe, this workshop explores vigilantism as a symptom that invites us to attend the complex and uneasy relationship between crime and policing as well as legal and extralegal forms of law enforcement, criminality, impunity, politics, and statecraft. We invite papers that: (i) explore the peculiar forms vigilante violence acquires in different contexts; (ii) depict the convergences with and divergences from the existing scholarly analyses; and (iii) highlight how these new forms force us to rethink the conventional articulations around statecraft and law.

The themes and questions we present below are not an exhaustive list and participants are more than welcome to expand the scope through interdisciplinary insights and methodologies:

- Exploring nascent modalities of vigilantism, vigilante violence, and impunity: What are the context-specific forms of vigilante groups and violence they inflict? How do they operate alongside or in conjunction with anti-immigration policies, racism, religion, and authoritarianism?
- Reconceptualizing vigilantism's link to the state and the law across contexts: Does vigilante activity always undermine the authority and legitimacy of the state? Can law be upheld by extralegal violence? May vigilante violence be aligned with the ideological imperatives of the state?
- Interrogating vigilantism as a resistance to social change and as an opposition to (demands for) equality: How is vigilante violence gendered? How do racism and right-wing backlash inform vigilantism? How is piety implicated in this interplay?
- Vigilantism at the threshold of crime and policing: Under what conditions vigilante activities are deemed criminal? Under what conditions vigilantism works as an effective tool of policing?
- The links between vigilantism and counterinsurgency: Can we think of vigilantism as a component of counterinsurgency? How can we make sense of long-enduring vigilante activities against/of dissident and racialized groups?
- Digital Vigilantism: How do new digital technologies of surveillance by non-state actors

enable parallel forms of criminal justice? How does online vigilantism complement other forms of vigilantism and contribute to the diffusion of punitive values and practices?

We kindly ask those interested to submit their abstracts (around 300 words) and short bios (100-200 words) via email to the organizers ([deniz.yonucu@gmail.com](mailto:deniz.yonucu@gmail.com), [erol.saglam@su.se](mailto:erol.saglam@su.se); [m.oosterbaan@uu.nl](mailto:m.oosterbaan@uu.nl)). **The deadline for submission of the abstracts is March 27, 2021.**

**The workshop will be held online on May 20-22, 2021 with sessions taking place between 12.00- 15.00 CET and 15.00-18.00 CET to accommodate presenters in different time zones.**

### Organizers

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