'Local Boys with Guns!' Is Armed Vigilantism an Indicator of the Global Trend Towards Privatised Security?

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The changing nature of conflicts, especially since the end of the Cold War, has led to the rising prominence of non-state actors in myriad forms involved in security provision at multilayered levels, vigilante groups being quite prominent amongst them. Non-state actors, in fact, increasingly control security initiatives, which give them increasing ownership of contemporary warfare and internal security provision through their ability to use violence to achieve the primary goal of targeting perceived threats to the stability of the state. Vigilantism, however, as a social phenomenon, has its own independent historical roots and has evolved as one of the many tools being used by the postmodern state to control and mediate violence in order to retain order and control. The process itself makes the state go beyond the traditional 'statist' institutions for security provision, which runs the risk of diluting the nature of the Westphalian state, affecting its policymaking and implementation capacity in providing security to its citizens as well as other aspects of economic and social policymaking.

Keywords: vigilantism, privatisation, state, armed groups, conflict, violence

Introduction

In the post-Cold War period, we find ourselves in a world of small wars and weak states; such developments, in turn, have intensified the trend towards privatisation of security through the involvement of agencies such as private military and security companies (PMSCs), warlords, militias, rebels, paramilitary groups, along with criminal gangs and organised crime syndicates. Global proliferation in the supply of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) as a result of better accessibility and poor or failing control mechanisms has also helped in perpetuating such conflicts at local levels. Worldwide, many governments are no longer capable of controlling the spiralling of violence and ensuring effective implementation of law and order. Official state agencies such as the police and the defence services are often too weak, too corrupt, or simply incapable

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of enforcing the rule of law and ensuring state monopoly over organised violence. For the state institutions traditionally responsible for security governance, tackling all these issues is indeed a tall order. This has resulted in outsourcing of security just as many other government services. This, however, does not mean, as several analysts have suggested, the complete loss of state monopoly or even the loss of its status as the leading security actor. Instead, the present global order has witnessed the creation of 'global security assemblages; settings where a range of different global and local, public and private security agents and normativities interact, cooperate and compete to produce new institutions, practices, and forms of security governance'.[1]

Vigilantism within a privatised security realm

Privatisation of security, however, is a more complex issue, going beyond simple outsourcing of certain security-related services. Having a rich historical tradition, the phenomenon has undoubtedly expanded as a part of the globalisation process. Such expansion of corporate and 'quasi-corporate' security, however, has raised questions over regulatory and control mechanisms and is also associated with important emerging issues related to the growing connectivity between security governance and development, bringing with it a host of ethical and legal issues into focus. In many underdeveloped or developing societies, characterised as intensely violent, violence ceases to be an aberration and becomes one of the modes of conflict management, along with more non-violent ones, to address socio-economic and political issues generating fissures, leading to conflicts in myriad forms.[2] This reduces and sometimes obliterates the differences between legal and quasi-legal organisations/institutions authorised to deal with conflicts and in addressing violence. Non-state actors, in fact, increasingly control military initiatives, which give them increasing ownership of contemporary warfare, the ability to use violence to achieve their goals.[3] As one author notes:

> In many developing countries, irregular armed forces are as or even more important than uniformed, state-financed soldiers and policemen using standard equipment and subject to centralised command and control. Around the world, political outcomes have been shaped by these irregular forces.[4]

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[1] R. Abrahamsen, M. C. Williams, 'Security beyond the State: Global Security Assemblages in International Politics', *International Political Sociology*, 2009, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 3.

[2] J. Nef, J. Vanderkop, 'The Spiral of Violence: Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Peru', *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 1988, Vol. 13, No. 26, p. 56.

[3] A. Karp, 'The Changing Ownership of War: States, Insurgencies and Technology', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 2009, Vol. 30, No. 2, p. 376.

[4] A. W. Pereira, 'Armed Forces, Coercive Monopolies, and Changing Patterns of State Formation and Violence', in Diane E. Davis, Anthony W. Pereira (eds), *Irregular Armed Forces and their Role in Politics and State Formation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, online edition 2009, p. 390.

The vigilante groups – or, more correctly, armed vigilante groups – have emerged as the most important among such quasi-legal groups used by the state in numerous conflict zones worldwide. Increasing dependence of numerous states, including many in Asia, on vigilantism against insurgency and other security-related threats is also to be considered a manifestation of the phenomenon of privatisation of security, especially in the context of the new threats emerging in the present times. In this context, one should remember the position of analyst David Kowalewski on the essential character of vigilantism. Kowalewski defined vigilante groups as social formations of private citizens formed to suppress deviance that are commonly employed by political regimes and mostly playing peripheral role to that of the military, police, and other established organs of force but could play a major role in protecting the establishment against political dissidence, especially when it grows and crosses the threshold into violence.[5]

Roots of vigilantism: a preliminary survey

While state-sponsored vigilantism can be regarded as a prominent development within the global security field, in this context the phenomenon of vigilantism has had a long historical tradition. Vigilante tradition in history invokes memories of extralegal policing as captured in the American Wild West incidents and legends of spontaneous, deadly vigilante criminal justice across the world.[6] In the context of 18th-century rural England, for instance, it has been shown that in village communities self-policing had been the rule, but the second half of the 18th century witnessed a move by the propertied classes towards private policing and protection societies.[7] Vigilante tradition was also widespread in non-Western societies; it has continued to exist and has morphed into new varieties over time.

Theoretically, vigilantism is no longer regarded as an aberration or transient phase leading to full exertion of state authority. It is now regarded rather as a part of the social process of collective violence to control or keep in check social or individual deviance.[8] Vigilantism, in this context, varies inversely with social polarisation and directly with the continuity of deviant behaviour.[9] Trying to establish a criminological definition of vigilantism, one author suggests classifying activities that include the following characteristics as vigilante action: (i) it involves planning and premeditation by those

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[5] D. Kowalewski, 'Counterinsurgent Vigilantism and Public Response: A Philippine Case Study', *Sociological Perspectives*, 1991, Vol. 34, No. 2,, p. 127.

[6] C. B. Little, C. P. Sheffield, 'Frontiers and Criminal Justice: English Private Prosecution Societies and American Vigilantism in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', 1983, *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 48, No. 6, p. 797.

[7] D. Jones, *Crime*, *protest, community and police in nineteenth- century Britain*, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1982, p. 20.

[8] R. Senechal de la Roche, 'Collective Violence as Social Control', *Sociological Forum*, 1996, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 120.

[9] Ibidem, p. 122

engaging in it; (ii) its participants are private citizens whose engagement is voluntary; (iii) it is a form of 'autonomous citizenship' and, as such, constitutes a social movement; (iv) it uses or threatens to use force; (v) it arises when an established order is under threat from a transgression, a potential transgression, or an imputed transgression of institutionalised norms; and, (vi) it aims to control crime or other social infractions by offering assurances (or 'guarantees') of security both to participants and to others.[10] These groups may sometimes act relatively independently of the state and can even help mark out spheres of autonomy where the state has little capacity to exert its authority. But usually they enjoy some degree of training, support and oversight by the state or by particular cliques within the state.[11] In this context, it could be defined as a part of the evolving 'public-private' partnership forged by the state in the realm of security, involving proxies to target its 'declared' enemies.[12]

In one of the most comprehensive analyses of the phenomenon, vigilantism has been defined as simply establishment violence, consisting of acts or threats of coercion in violation of the formal boundaries of an established socio-political order, which, however, are intended by the violators to defend that order from some form of subversion.[13] Vigilantism can come in different forms, such as crime-control, social-group control and regime control, and as it has been argued, these phenomena are often too diverse to be studied as different types of a single type of political activity.[14] What, however, separates vigilante action from wanton violence is that it aims at system maintenance and social order, which the vigilante groups perceive to be beneficial to their interests. The magnitude of vigilante violence, in fact, as Rosenbaum and Sederberg note, 'appears negatively related to the ability (both objective capability and "will") of the regime to defend its formal boundaries against this type of breeching and positively related to the scope and coherence of social support for the vigilante movement'.[15]

Vigilantism, in this context, often attempts to generate a fear psychosis by projecting an adverse analytical picture of the existing system, which threatens it with collapse.[16]

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[10] For details, see Les Johnston, 'What is Vigilantism?', *The British Journal of Criminology*, 1996, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 220–236.

[11] J. Barker, ' Introduction: Ethnographic Approaches to the Study of Fear', *Anthropologica*, 2009, Vol. 51, No. 2, p. 269.

[12] N. Sundar, 'Public-Private Partnerships in the Industry of Security', in Z. Gambetti, M. Godoy-Anativia (eds), *Rhetorics of Insecurity: Belonging and Violence in the Neoliberal Era*, New York: New York University Press, 2013, p. 153.

[13] H. J. Rosenbaum, P. C. Sederberg, 'Vigilantism: An Analysis of Establishment Violence', *Comparative Politics*, 1974, Vol. 6, No. 4, p. 542.

[14] E. Stettner, Vigilantism and Political Theory', in H. J.Rosenbaum, P.C. Sederberg (eds), *Vigilante Politics*, U.S.A.: University of Pennsylvania, 1976, p. 75.

[15] H. J. Rosenbaum, P. C. Sederberg, 'Vigilantism: An Analysis of Establishment Violence', in H. Jon Rosenbaum, Peter C. Sederberg (eds), op.cit., pp. 7–8.

[16] R. S. Katz, J. Bailey, 'The Militia, A Legal and Social Movement Analysis: Will the real Militia Please Stand Up? Militia Hate Group or the Constitutional Militia?', *Sociological Focus*, 2000, Vol. 33, No. 2, Special Issue: White Supremacy and Hate Crimes, p. 137.

Counter-violence is thus offered as the only plausible alternative to total destruction and anarchy. As opposed to traditional explanations, emphasising the special social, psychological, or political orientations of vigilantes, the phenomenon has also been explained in terms of a 'criminological model,' identifying vigilante action as an agent of community social control. This model suggests that participation in vigilante action is more strongly linked to the division of social control labour in vigilante communities than to characteristics that are seen to predispose particular individuals to vigilante violence.[17]

While vigilantism has certainly evolved over time and space, certain basic strategic types of vigilante activities could be broadly identified as standardised types, such as: Organised Civic Prevention Initiatives, Organised Civic Initiatives of Prevention and Response, Spontaneous Mob Actions, Popular Justice, Outsourcing to Informal Security Agencies and the Mobilising Initiatives of the Extreme Right.[18]

While most categories of vigilantism primarily aim at regime protection and social order, in certain failed states vigilantes are sometimes deliberately used by the cornered regime in destroying social order through attacks on state institutions as well as civil society. Self-destructive despotism thus has a logic, if a perverse one. Governments often have incentives to weaken or even destroy states to give themselves greater freedom of action, to generate resources for supporters, or to weaken potential centres of resistance.[19] This is usually done through manipulation of the bureaucracy and creation of militias and vigilante forces to supplant the traditional police and state-controlled armed forces in order to protect the regime. The irony is that as chances of the regime falling increase, militia leaders increasingly have an incentive to desert it so as to survive and perhaps thrive after its fall.[20] Such types of vigilantism particularly thrive in areas experiencing low intensity warfare involving ambiguous categories of insurgency, counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, accompanied by varying degrees of state fragmentation.[21]

Vigilantism is also often prevalent during times of transition from a war state to a post-conflict state. In most cases, post-conflict transition in societies does not cease endemic violence, as the state's practice of co-opting communities into the violent struggle during the conflict, it has been argued, gives rise to a culture of violent collective action that outlives the war. In addition, the peace process and subsequent restructuring of the state often generates a vacuum in state efficacy, which vigilantes

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[17] D. Weisburd, 'Vigilantism as Community Social Control: Developing a Quantitative Criminological Mode ', *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 1988, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 151–152.

[18] For details, see M. Kucera, M. Mares, 'Vigilantism during democratic transition', *Policing and Society: An International Journal of Research and Policy*, 2013, pp. 1–18.

[19] N. A. Englehart, 'Governments against States: The Logic of Self-Destructive Despotism', *International Political Science Review*, 2007, Vol. 28, No. 2, p. 148.

[20] Ibidem.

[21] A.Hills, 'Policing, enforcement and low intensity conflict', *Policing and Society: An International Journal of Research and Policy*, 1997, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 291–308.

aim to fill through their use of social violence.[22] Vigilantism is also often successful during the transition phase, which involves rising equity gaps in the society, as issues of security and the moral order that are pertinent to people living on the margins of the formal state apparatus and state law get more successfully addressed by them.[23] The goal in this context is to distribute the authority to use force in such a way that the security needs of the population are met, without bias or discrimination, within the framework of rule of law. The strategy for achieving this can include a mix of state and non-state security providers if that is the wish of local communities, openly expressed by participation in the planning and implementation of security reforms.[24]

Vigilante activities are, however, not essentially restricted to failed states or states facing low intensity conflict over a long period. Vigilantism is, for instance, quite noticeable in more stable societies, including democracies. In post-colonial societies, it is, in fact, quite common to have the security provision machinery consisting of thousands and thousands of micro-level machines, dispersed throughout all levels of society, including neighbourhood watch groups, youth organisations, militias, gangs, and local toughs.[25] Many pluralist democracies in developing and underdeveloped parts of the world fall within the category of 'Low Intensity Democracies', trying to maintain balance between the rise of the lower classes resulting from social mobilisation among the masses and domination of the elite at the top. The existing governments are often tempted to adopt illiberal policies and extraordinary measures to ensure domination of the elite and tackle the resulting security-related threats.[26] This often leads to engagement of state security personnel in vigilante action. While there have been historical instances of such types of 'pseudo-vigilante' action, 'from there it is a further step to the kind of pseudo-vigilantism in which government personnel in Central and South America and other areas organise counterinsurgency or themselves operate directly as death squads while claiming that the killings that ensue are popular vigilante-style reactions to their target victims'.[27] But the co-existence of vigilante groups within pluralist democracies has sought to be identified not as aberration but as

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[22]   C. Steenkamp, 'In the shadows of war and peace: making sense of violence after peace accords', *Conflict, Security & Development*, 2011, Vol. 11, No. 3, p. 375.

[23]   L. Buur, 'Democracy & its Discontents: Vigilantism, Sovereignty & Human Rights in South Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, 2008, Vol. 35, No. 118, p. 583.

[24]   O. Marenin, 'Restoring Policing Systems in Conflict Torn Nations: Process, Problems, Prospects', *Occasional Paper No.7*, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), June 2005, p. 59, Columbia International Affairs Online, https://www.ciaonet.org/wps/dca006/dca006.pdf (accessed on 16 November 2013).

[25]   J. Barker, 'Vigilantes and the State', *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, 2006, Vol. 50, No. 1, pp. 205.

[26]   For details, see B. Gills, J. Rocamora, 'Low Intensity Democracy', in *Third World Quarterly*, 1992, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 501–523.

[27]   R. Abrahams, 'Some Thoughts on the Comparative Study of Vigilantism', in D. Pratten, A. Sen (eds), *Global Vigilantes*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008, p. 42.

somewhat essential to fissured societies. In the context of South American democracies, for instance, it has been argued:

> Political and social pluralism coexist with a pluralism of violence in which different groups maintain order over different levels of politics and society. Democracy and possible future instances of authoritarianism can only be understood in the wider context of the control of violence by the private groups at the local and regional levels.[28]

Vigilante actions by gangs, death squads, private militias, and other groups have long existed in Latin America, but they are now embedded in the region's democratic regimes.[29]

While vigilante activities differ as per the constitutive background and divergence of different groups along with the temporal and spatial factors, functionally, three purposes appear to predominate among the divergent groups. These are the three aims of crime control, social group control, and regime control. In its most generic form, vigilantism thus presupposes the existence of an order of some kind, which it aims to protect as a whole, or whose deficiencies it wishes to point out, or against which it defines itself. As a rule, vigilantism therefore does not appear in an anarchic environment but in a state of injustice.[30] Vigilante groups, in this sense, emerge out of existing government efforts to 'deputise' local people, setting them to work fighting 'crime' or social deviance at little or no cost, harnessing the energy of local people in this struggle, bypassing the lethargic, corrupt 'formal' law enforcement system.[31] Particularly for vigilante groups appropriating state functions related to security, the process cannot be completely arbitrary, as such groups have to undergo a process of legitimation. As one author writes:

> Although those who seek to exercise the powers of government in respect of particular areas of policy are not challenging the regime or the rulers in their entirety, they nonetheless legitimate themselves in respect of the coercive direct action which they undertake.[32]

Scattered through the sparse literature on vigilantism are a number of contradictory propositions about public response, which might be synthesised under two heuristic

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[28] E. D. Arias, 'Understanding Violent Pluralism', in E. D. Arias, D. M. Goldstein (eds), *Violent Democracies in Latin America,* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010, p. 250.

[29] M. Ungar, 'The Privatization of Citizen Security in Latin America: From Elite Guards to Neighborhood Vigilantes ', 2007, *Social Justice*, Vol. 34, Nos. 3–4, p. 24.

[30] M. Kucera, M. Mares, 'Vigilantism during democratic Transition', 2013, *Policing and Society: An International Journal of Research and Policy*, p. 2.

[31] M. L. Fleisher, ' "Sungusungu": State-Sponsored Village Vigilante Groups among the Kuria of Tanzani', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 2000, Vol. 70, No. 2, p. 210.

[32] R. Barker, *Legitimating Identities: The Self Presentations of Rulers and Subjects*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 102.

rubrics: crystallized simplicity and fluid complexity.[33] The first model is developed in the context of a fairly stable society where any kind of disruption created by insurgency is opposed by the majority to the extent that state use of vigilante groups is tolerated, or even supported, in the name of reducing social conflict and restoring public peace. The other model of 'fluid complexity' refers to a more unstable society where the unpopular regime uses vigilantism merely to protect itself from collapsing.[34]

While state support for vigilantism remains essential, many of the armed vigilante groups had independent origins bound to pre-existing milieus, locales, and micro-arenas.[35] Thus while governments or single-state agencies may deploy such groups in conflict situations for objectives that regular forces are unwilling or unable to achieve, there always remains the possibility of such groups developing a life of their own.[36]

Shifting vigilantism: a survey of its evolutionary style and pattern

Continuation of state-sponsored vigilante activities, thus, theoretically has sought to have been explained by regime-protection mentality or even targeting of vulnerable or subaltern groups in an evolving society when the domination of the elite is perceptibly under threat. While such socio-political underpinnings remain influential, their rise is also influenced by the security privatisation process – a global reality, particularly in the post- Cold War period. The globalisation of private security provides, in fact, a striking illustration of the shifting structures of global governance and highlights the importance of prising apart the 'state–territory–authority' triptych.[37] According to Mark Duffield, the post-Cold War period has witnessed the merging of development and security, giving rise to innovative 'Strategic Complexes', leading to linkages between various state and non-state actors on a global scale.[38] This, however, should not be construed as a sign of weakness of the state but more often as part of a deliberate policy of outsourcing, increasingly adopted across the board. In this sense, one author refers to the state as not 'weak' but a 'cunning one'. The cunning state, according to this author:

> Show strength or weakness depending on the domestic interests at stake. 'Cunning' is a weapon of weak states, or, more precisely, of the stronger among subordinate states

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[33] D. Kowalewski, 'Vigilantism and Public Response: A Philippine Case Study', op.cit., p. 128.

[34] Ibidem, pp. 127–144.

[35] K. Schlichte, 'With the State against the State? The formation of Armed Groups', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 2009, Vol. 30, No. 2, p. 261.

[36] Ibidem, p. 247.

[37] R.Abrahamsen and M. C. Williams, 'Securing the City: Private Security Companies and Non-State Authority in Global Governance', *International Relations*, 2007, Vol. 21, No. 2, p. 238.

[38] M. Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security*, London: Zed Books, 2005, p. 45.

in the international system. It does not describe a characteristic of state structure or capacities but the changing nature of the relationship of national elites … to citizens. The notion of a cunning state is thus a useful way to delineate a range of tactics deployed at various sites of negotiation where a shift in responsibilities and sovereignties occur.[39]

Vigilante groups, in this context, are often used by the state in security outsourcing as auxiliaries (or to put it more graphically, as low-cost 'trigger-pullers').[40] While the rise of vigilantism has sought to be explained as a part of the security privatisation process intrinsically associated with the evolving nature of the state and changes in governance procedures involving attempts to cope with globalisation, it has to be remembered that vigilantism is also dependent upon localised cultural and historical frameworks.[41] Modern developments have influenced their functioning in various ways. Some groups may continue to display pre-modernist influencing factors. Members of the well-known vigilante group in Eastern Nigeria, the Bakassi Boys, for instance, had to submit themselves to a process of initiation, in which oaths of secrecy were sworn during veiled ceremonies in which they learnt to communicate with other members through secret signs and words. They also had to observe special taboos, such as not touching certain foods, displaying occult signs on their body, and above all, they were forbidden to engage in any sexual activities to retain ritual purity.[42] Accused of gross human right violations by both the state regulatory authorities as well as international watchdogs, the Nigerian federal government was forced to impose a ban on the group in 2002, which was overtly and covertly opposed by local administrators and affluent trading communities in the eastern Nigerian towns. Since then, many of the former members of the Bakassi Boys have been admitted into new groups, such as the Ananbra State Vigilante Services, which are subject to more direct political control.

Another instance of criminal gangs taking up the task of community protection during troubled times has been that of local toughs in Kolkata (then known as Calcutta), India, during the period of the 'Great Calcutta killing' in 1946. It was a period of intense rioting and clashes between Hindu and Muslim communities, exacerbated by the apathy shown by the British authorities on a withdrawal mode following the end of the Second War and the Muslim League government in Bengal trying to derive political mileage in support of an independent break-away state of Pakistan, many

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[39] S. Randeria, 'The State of Globalization: Legal Plurality, overlapping sovereignties and ambiguous alliances between civil society and the cunning state in India', in *Theory Culture & Society*, 2007, Vol. 24, No. 1, p. 3.

[40] W. Rosenau, ' "Low-Cost Trigger-Pullers" The Politics of Policing in the Context of Contemporary 'State Building' and Counterinsurgency', *Working Paper,WR-620-USCA*, 2008, Rand, pp. 1–2.

[41] A. Sen, D. Pratten, 'Global vigilantes: perspectives on justice and violence', in D. Pratten, A. Sen (eds), op.cit., p.6.

[42] J. Harnischfeger, 'The Bakassi Boys: Fighting Crime in Nigeria', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 2003, Vol. 41, No. 1, p. 34.

members of the Hindu community would provide regular donations to local Hindu gang leaders to buy their protection. One such prominent group was the *Bharat Jatiya Bahini*, created by the leader Gopal Mukherjee, a well known local tough operating in the northern districts of Calcutta. At its peak, the *Bharat Jatiya Bahini* had around 400 members. While their influence ebbed pretty soon after normalcy was restored after the riots, these groups would often try to deny the fact that they were rooted in criminal activities and would try to justify their creation and existence by claiming that their aim was to protect vulnerable and innocent people (belonging to their own community) in times of distress, particularly in the face of state apathy or tacit and open support for their persecution.[43]

Thus, even if the rise of the vigilante groups is independent of state patronage, ultimately, the nature of their work and operations make them adopt a more pro-government line or justify their action in terms of fulfilling the void generated through lacuna in state actions in providing security. One analyst notes:

> Even in contexts where vigilantes are not so formally affiliated with the state, they present themselves as champions of ideals – law and order, justice, and the exercise of power and the use of violence in the name of moral rectitude – that are the basis of state sovereignty. Vigilantes do not commonly contest the legitimacy of those ideals, but rather assert that they are better placed to police them, thereby reinforcing the pre existing political/moral order.[44]

This perhaps explains why the existing governments are willing to tolerate certain types of vigilante action while opposing or restricting other types. It has been argued, for instance, that the state aims to curb vigilante action in order to protect: government (or regime) interests; rising social costs of violent methods usually adopted by the vigilante groups; and, popular perception regarding efficacy of state machinery, which may decline if there is a failure to control excessive violence.[45] It has been argued that all forms of security privatisation, including vigilantism, affect internal social order. The fear of this interference is, in fact, arguably greater when dealing with privatised bottom-up security services provided by gangs and private militia than when dealing with privatised top-down security services.[46] The perceived threat is to democratic principles of accountability and process in what has been a largely unexamined shift from public to private governance. On both the national and the

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[43] S. Das, J. K. Ray, *The Goondas: Towards a reconstruction of the Calcutta Underworld*, Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Ltd., 1996, p. 14.

[44] D. J. Smith, 'Domesticating Vigilantism in Africa (review)', *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute*, 2012, Vol. 82, No. 3, pp. 493–494.

[45] K. D. Hine, 'Vigilantism Revisited: An Economic Analysis of the Law of Extra-Judicial Self-help or why can't Dick shoot Henry for stealing Jane's truck', *The American University Law Review*, 1998, Vol. 47, No. 5, pp. 1248–1252.

[46] R. Mandel, 'The Privatization of Security', *Armed Forces & Society,* 2001, Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 134.

global stage, a 'democracy deficit' may be emerging.[47] Fighting revolutionary deviance with counter-revolutionary paramilitary deviance seems counter-productive, with such attempts provoking a negative citizen reaction against non-institutional attempts to such counterinsurgency tactics and methods.[48] Endemic violence may reconfigure and reconstruct the nature of vigilante groups by strengthening ethno-religious identities and by extending the functional basis of vigilantism.[49]

Leaving aside traditional models, we are currently witnessing a plethora of non-state armed groups, many of which are pro-government. The formation of paramilitary, civilian defence and armed vigilante groups can be seen as both symptoms and causal factors in processes of societal militarisation and weapons proliferation. It has been argued that the excessive militarisation of a society may lead to a process of mental militarisation, in which violent responses to social problems become the norm. The Jesuit scholar and social psychologist Ignacio Martin-Baro writes, for instance, in the context of the long drawn Salvadorian civil war:

> The deterioration in the material conditions of life; the persisting climate of insecurity and, in many cases, of terror; having to construct a life on a foundation of violence; polarized or ambiguous references; the awareness of falsehood or fear of the truth-these effects of the war ultimately break down resistances or encourage adaptations that, in the best of cases, reveal an abnormal normality, formed from alienating and depersonalising social ties.[50]

The highly militarised nature of communities can profoundly colour individual perceptions of what constitutes security threats and crises. The dual sense of fear and empowerment that the widespread use of armaments brings to groups and individuals can disrupt rational decision-making processes and destroy perceptions of non-violent options for conflict resolution. The result is societal brutalisation and the collapse of traditional value systems.[51] The twin face of vigilantism, then, is a displacement of culpability, both by the state, which can blame people for taking law into their own hands, and by people, who can blame their own actions on state inaction.[52]

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[47] P. R. Verkuil, *Outsourcing Sovereignty: Why Privatization of Government Functions Threatens Democracy and What We Can Do about It*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, online edition 2009, p. 2.

[48] D. Kowalewski, 'Counterinsurgent Paramilitarism: A Philippine Case Study', *Journal of Peace Research*, 1992, Vol. 29, No. 1, p. 81.

[49] A. Higazi, 'Social Mobilization and Collective Violence: Vigilantes and Militias in the Lowlands of Plateau State, Central Nigeria', *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute*, 2008, Vol. 78, No. 1, p. 132.

[50] A. Wallace, 'War and Mental Health', in A. Aron, S. Corne (eds), *I. Martin-Baro, 'Writings for a Liberation Psychology,* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 118.

[51] C. Louise, The Social Impacts of Light Weapons Availability and Proliferation, *Discussion Paper No.59*, 1995, The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), p. 16.

[52] N. Sundar, 'Vigilantism, Culpability and Moral Dilemmas'*,Critique of Anthropology,* 2010, Vol. 30, No. 1, p. 114.

The term vigilante justice is also often applied to give legitimacy to utter travesty of justice itself and cloaked increasing violence of settled communities against economically vulnerable communities and social outcastes. In the context of India, for instance, it has been claimed that vigilante actions with tacit police support frequently occur *vis a vis* the nomadic and de-notified communities.[53] During the 1980s, when the Indian state of Punjab faced a separatist movement orchestrated by some Sikh militant groups, the state's counterinsurgency policy included undercover groups set up by the police, ostensibly to penetrate terrorist organisations, but which ended up being criminal gangs harassing common people. Across Latin America, death squads and paramilitary/parapolice groups made up of off-duty police, military, and civilians deliver impromptu justice, including torture and murder in the name of maintaining order and security.[54] Simple criticism or banning of vigilante activities would not work as long as the reforms of state-level security institutions remain underdeveloped and unutilised, including the implementation of democratic policing mechanisms with the aim to ensure that policing is not only responsive to public safety needs but also adheres to democratic principles of respect for the dignity and civil liberties of citizens in order to build public trust in the police.[55] In this context, many analysts now favour community policing in place of vigilante groups as the bottom-up approach towards democratisation of security governance process.

Concluding remarks: feasibility of a bottom-up securitisation policy

One of the major characterising functions of the modern state, at least theoretically, has been its monopoly over organised violence. For that purpose, states have traditionally tended to institutionalise coercive force, principally by controlling the military and the police towards this end. The post-Cold War period, however, has witnessed a proliferation of intra-state conflicts of various types, severely taxing the capabilities of nation-states all across the globe. The failure of traditional state institutions to cope with the low intensity conflicts has resulted in overall privatisation of violence: from the bottom up through rising threat potential of various non-state actors and from the top down through the gradual loss of state monopoly over violence ensured through the outsourcing of traditional security-related functions to the private sector.

One major feature of this process of privatisation of violence and security has been the proliferation of vigilantism as a global phenomenon. Unlike other trends associated with the process of privatisation of security (for instance, the rise of the Private Military

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[53] M. Radhakrishna, 'Crime of Vigilante Justice', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2008, Vol. 43, No. 2, p. 18.

[54] M. K. Huggins (ed.), *Vigilantism and the State in Modern Latin America: Essays on Extra-legal Violence*, New York: Prarger, 1991, p. 2.

[55] J. Tankebe, 'Self-Help, Policing, and Procedural Justice: Ghanaian Vigilantism and the Rule of Law', *Law & Society Review*, 2009, Vol. 43, No. 2, p. 262.

Companies – PMCs), the sharp rise in vigilante activities in the post-Cold War period has not yet attracted enough scholarly attention. Moreover, much of the scholarly research addressing the rise of vigilantism from a security-related or even sociological perspective has mainly dealt with the rising incidence of vigilantism in certain specific conflict zones, such as in the countries of South America and in Africa. Focus on the spread of vigilantism, which has witnessed a significant rise in the post-Cold War period, has been mainly sporadic and journalistic in nature, critical rather than analytical. This essay hopes to bridge this gap by focusing primarily on those vigilante activities that involve armed groups in conflict zone seeking to maintain an established order where state institutions seem to be weak or failing.

Resorting to vigilantism is often justified in terms of regime protection and protection of the social order and legal framework. Both vigilantism directly sponsored by the state and societal vigilantism are often legitimated in the name of the democratic security regime. Ensuring democratic security sector governance has been argued to be a way of ensuring sustainable and holistic security in post conflict societies.[56] In search of new means and ways of providing justice, a concept was developed in the context of conflict-torn Northern Ireland during the late 1990s – Community based Restorative Justice (CBRJ), which is more non-violent, consensual and inclusive and involves dialogic philosophy of restorative justice, which contrasts sharply with the violence and repression of paramilitary systems of punishment that were widely prevalent earlier.[57] Community policing is also being adopted as a set of practices featuring civilian participation in the provision of public safety services; it is appropriate to regard it as a positive and significant innovation for police and public alike.[58] The effects of such developments on curbing vigilante activities, however, remain doubtful. Vigilantism does not constitute merely a functional element within the non-conventional state approaches towards ensuring security and order. As it has been shown, it is closely tied to local roots and often evolves autonomously as a part of evolving socio-political dynamics, which then get appropriated by the state. Thus public and private security initiatives often get braided into local security assemblages where state law is not so much absent as reconfigured, with the spectacles of legal and illegal being graphically interwoven with each other.[59] The evolving nature of security privatisation is thus a complex process that involves multiple actors dependent upon local specificities and

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[56] N. Ball, 'Strengthening Democratic Governance of the Security Sector in Conflict-Affected Countries', *Public Administration and Development, Public Admin. Dev*., 2005, Vol. 25, pp. 25–38, Published online in Wiley InterScience (www.interscience.wiley.com) DOI: 10.1002/pad.345 (accessed on 16 November 2013).

[57] F. Ashe, 'From Paramilitaries to Peacemakers: The Gender Dynamics of Community-Based Restorative Justice in Northern Ireland', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 2009, Vol. 11, No. 2, p. 300.

[58] J. H. Skolnick, D. H. Bayley, 'Theme and Variation in Community Policing', *Crime and Justice*, 1988, Vol. 10 p. 35.

[59] G. Super, 'Volatile Sovereignty: Governing Crime through the Community in Khayelitsha', *Law & Society Review*, Volume 50, Number 2 (2016) p. 478.

historical roots, vigilantism being one of the most prominent among them. While it is not something strictly new, its efficacy in bringing down the incidence of violence or in maintaining state capacity as the main provider of security in conflict-prone zones globally is yet to be formally accepted. While greater acceptance of security-related conceptualisations like global 'security assemblages' give increasing legitimacy to the practice of using private security providers, including vigilante groups, it generates visible and invisible collateral damage and raises vital questions related to moral efficacy and legitimacy of the statist power project during our postmodernist times. Such questions have broader implications for the entire humanity going beyond mere academic queries.