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Gilles Favarel-Garrigues[a], Samuel Tanner[b] and Daniel Trottier[c]

[a]Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Sciences Po-CERI, Paris, France; [b]School of Criminology, Université de Montréal, Pavillon Lionel-Groulx, Montréal, QC, Canada; [c]Erasmus University Rotterdam

In Europe and America, political mobilisations have emboldened citizens to monitor and harass individuals based on categories of suspicion, for instance illegal migrants. These mobilisations, in turn, have spawned counter-movements seeking to render perpetrators of hate-speech and harassment visible and accountable. Depending on the cause defended and the political context, governments may even explicitly support citizen groups that publicise and denounce suspected wrongdoing by other citizens. Digital media cultures facilitate the sharing of evidence of offensive acts, but also the shaming of targeted individuals and a broader moralising against criminal or otherwise undesirable populations. Visibility, as manifest through the public and open distribution of a target's personal details, stands as a central feature of contemporary vigilante campaigns.

This special issue considers the emergence of digitally mediated vigilantism, particularly as a phenomenon that not only transcends any particular national context but also transcends the boundary between crime control and other aims such as entertainment and ideological advancement. By way of this introduction, we seek to provide a brief account of the emergence of digital vigilantism, highlighting pressing concerns with the study of this practice. This, in turn, informs the selection and arrangement of our chapters, which we outline below.

While the digital sphere is undoubtedly a crucial aspect of this visibility, one also has to consider a more profound transformation in societal participation, or how a given population relates to and perceives its authorities when social, political, cultural, religious, moral and security issues are at stake. As shown in assessments of late modernity, liberal and neo-liberal politics have deputised citizens by rendering them responsible for their own security and fate, and for social order,[1] thus leading to a multilateralized regulatory network rather than strictly top-down governance of society.[2] Yet deputised citizens are not only following their authorities' recommendations; they are also self-directed in what they consider the good march of society. According to Walsh,[3] such a transformation in societal participation led to a shift from a *deputisation* to an *autonomization* paradigm, referring to the voluntary, or self-appointed, involvement of citizens in the regulatory gatekeeping network. This refers to grassroot mobilisation, rather than governments mobilising the public, with groups of citizens spontaneously aligning themselves with authorities' aims and objectives.[4] Autonomization also invokes a context in which an

ideal-typical state claims to monopolise law-enforcement functions, in contrast to groups acting strictly autonomously, or as challengers of state law-enforcement institutions.

However, these transformations should not lead researchers to underestimate historical continuities with classical forms of citizens' involvement in denunciation, law enforcement and vigilante justice. One of the most recurrent forms of autonomization is vigilantism as a form of societal participation. Even if it is formally unsolicited, vigilantism represents an 'outgrowth of state activity'.[5] According to Walsh, 'while operating without official authorization, the organizations do not perceive their actions as overriding or transgressing the local order but construct themselves as self-anointed guardians rescuing national sovereignty, citizenship and the law's moral sanctity, from cultural elites, moneyed interests, inept bureaucrats and a sclerotic state'.[6] For Favarel-Garrigues and Gayer,[7] vigilantism may be defined as 'collective coercive practices undertaken by non-state actors in order to enforce norms (legal or moral) and/or to take the law in their own hands'. Such practices are typically public knowledge 'because they either are conducted in public, in the name of a community of reference, or because the witnesses to more secretly conducted punishing expeditions spread the information and nourish the group's reputation' (ibid.).

If early scholarship established a first definition of vigilantism based on US history,[8] more recent criminological, sociological and anthropological works have focused on vigilante *practices and activities* in the field, at a glocal level.[9] More specifically, and considering the recent developments in media and communication, we want to focus on the impacts and interactions between vigilantism and the digital sphere. On this matter, Trottier defines digital vigilantism as 'a process where citizens are collectively offended by other citizen activity, and respond through coordinated retaliation on digital media platforms, including mobile devices and social media platforms'.[10] Digital vigilantism refers, but is not limited, to a basic principle of 'naming and shaming', or through a 'weaponisation of visibility', that is sharing the target's personal details by publishing/distributing them on public sites ('doxing'). According to Trottier 'the emergence of social, geolocated, ubiquitous media has led to a dissolution' of any geographic barrier.[11] Digital vigilantism implies a paradigm shift with regard to the *context* in which digital media are used, pointing to the end of a yet well-established distinction between online activity and offline consequences.[12] Digital communication typically results in 'context collapse', in which the 'lack of spatial, social, and temporal boundaries makes it difficult to maintain distinct social contexts'.[13] As Reagle puts it: 'Comment's reactivity, shortness, and asynchronicity mean that it is especially contextual but that its context also is easily lost as it is forwarded and retweeted'.[14] Thus, both incriminating and denunciatory content online may be firmly situated in a particular context where a particular individual or group is aggrieved. Yet this content lives on well beyond this context and may bring about unanticipated consequences for those involved.

Taken together, recent scholarship on vigilantism through digital tools identifies growing areas of concern. First, in joining several categories of seemingly disparate practices, accounts of digitally mediated vigilantism may trouble or force a reconsideration of particular concepts. This most obviously includes the term vigilantism itself, as scholarship in this area has been characterised by 'conceptual discord'.[15] Even in focusing on digitally mediated communication, vigilantism appears to extend to practices such as doxing[16] as well as 'scambaiting, hacktivism, citizen lead cyber-stings, and crowdsourc[ing]'.[17]

Groups in question may be borne out of digital platforms, without any in-person gatherings or manifestations. Conversely, they may be pre-existing organisations that migrate onto (or simply make use of) platforms like WhatsApp and Twitter.

Media platforms appear to serve a crucial role in reconfiguring phenomena such as viral outrage,[18] which may extend from other tabloid and reality television media formats. The confluence between justice-seeking and entertainment, in particular appears to be a global development,[19] such that digital criminology is a distinct and growing field.[20] Beyond relatively new technologies like social platforms and mobile devices, scholarship is preoccupied with the role of press in shaping terms like 'web sleuthing'.[21] Following an understanding of vigilantism as extra-legal, scholars have also considered conceptual boundaries (and marginal cases) where the state may support or at least tolerate these practices. This includes studying the perception of state by participants, as well as interpretations of active citizenship in public safety.[22] Finally, it bears noting that a term like 'vigilante' is politically loaded, invoking a particular set of dimensions for researchers, but it also casts groups in a particular light, with repercussions in terms of their perceived legitimacy.

Second, these developments occur and are understood through particular understandings of social justice. Recent instances of digital vigilantism include denunciation against sexual violence,[23] hate speech[24] and drought shaming.[25] In such cases, press and other popular accounts may celebrate these denunciations as both progressive and necessary (see Time Magazine person of the year 2017). Particular cases and rhetoric may align these practices with ethical and moral forms of civil disobedience. On the other hand, right populists might leverage outrage against sexual minorities, migrants and other vulnerable populations,[26] notably in the context of racist and nationalist movements. These initiatives too are fuelled by particular world views and political ideologies, and are also celebrated in particular media venues that underscore hegemonic ideological motivations.[27] In either instance, user-led denunciations appear to be informed by a 'more sustained sense of political crisis that characterizes contemporary life'.[28] Public perception of legitimacy of a denunciation may be based more on ideological context, rather than judicial measures such as proportionality or presumption of innocence (see Time Magazine's 2017 person of the year).

Third, and relatedly, political and historic contexts shape digital vigilantism. Vigilantes may break from state-led justice-seeking, but they are not aberrant social actors in the political context of their activities. Rather, they are often self-appointed guardians of a particular social order. In the context of cyber-nationalism, one witnesses a tension: on the one hand, practices appear to draw from globalised repertoires such as the production and circulation of meme images. Yet this occurs in contexts that are historically and politically contested, often as a pushback against globalisation. National borders are at the same time fiercely defended and transcended. A growing set of literature considers the Human Flesh Search Engine[29] as a result of the Chinese digital media landscape's distancing from Silicon Valley influence. Yet other regions including the post-Soviet sphere warrant attention not only due to the Kremlin's direct influence on civil society, but also on the digitally mediated platforms on which civil society may communicate with, denounce one another, and produce vigilante shows.[30]

We have arranged the six articles that make up this special issue in light of the conceptual, ideological and political factors that shape digital vigilante scholarship. The first two contributions to this issue propose conceptual frameworks to understand both

the diversity and common characteristics of mediated vigilantism. Trottier's article, in particular, offers a procedural model of digital vigilantism. In doing so he seeks to reconcile disparate practices, notably those that make use of digital media affordances that distribute actionable content to a dispersed network of participants. This model is centred on offence taking as a trigger in mediated interventions, while also attentive to broader social conditions which render these possible. Trottier proposes both mediated policing and mediated denunciations as stages that provide context and consequence for offence taking. In doing so he also underscores the presence and role of institutions such as branches of state and the press, which may both maintain ideological distance from these movements, all while augmenting their scope and impact.

Loveluck's contribution addresses the diversity of offences and repertoires that characterise digital vigilantism, while coming to terms with the expanse of online interventions that have become so feasible in recent years. His article seeks nuance in talking about these practices. It centres digital vigilantism in terms of both the regime of visibility in which social actors find themselves (such that we are perpetually generating information about ourselves and about others), along with a culture of self-regulation, as persistent features of online sociality. By drawing on a range of cases over between 2015 and 2018, this article proposes ideal types of mediated intervention: flagging, investigating, hounding and organised leaking. These practices underscore the variance of digital vigilantism in context and intensity.

The second set of contributions considers mediated denunciation and harassment in the context of far-right movements. Vicenová addresses the use of digital media platforms by far-right vigilante groups in Slovakia. Such groups harness social media in order to reinforce a national identity, through the assault and intimidation of marginalised communities. Of particular relevance is the underlying claim that branches of the state are not only failing citizens, but also scaling up this denunciation in order to reject the 'basic principles of liberal democracy'. This timely work addresses the broader context of far-right ideologies in Central and Eastern Europe, and highlights practices that clearly embody elements of both digital and non-digital vigilantism. It points to a troubling set of practices that are firmly situated both across online fora and in physical spaces such as public transport and urban centres.

Tanner and Campana's contribution focuses on how a far-right vigilante group in Quebec (La Meute) makes use of digital media in order to assert a particular social order that excludes minority and otherwise marginalised communities. In addition to purporting to combat crime, the authors present La Meute as enacting societal vigilantism,[31] which aims to police a broader range of 'collective attributes perceived as deviant'. This article is attentive to the formation of repertoires of discourses and practices online, which includes targeting categories of (typically already vulnerable) individuals by circulating stereotypes in digital content which risk both contributing to 'information bubbles' for those proximate to these groups, all while shaping mainstream discourses.

The final set of contributions considers the specific attributes of digital vigilantism in the post-Soviet context. Gabdulhakov addresses the assertion and defence of the Russian Internet, which suggests the establishment of a 'digital iron curtain'. This is a development in which citizens denounce fellow citizens in a volatile legal context where notions of 'extremism' and 'disrespect' may be selectively interpreted. Here Haggerty and Ericson's notion of the 'surveillant assemblage'[32] highlights how seemingly citizen-led practices

can be temporarily instrumentalised in order to support state initiatives towards online sovereignty. These developments further complicate relations between state and citizen in vigilante practices, as vigilant initiatives are selectively and temporarily tolerated, and actionable content yielded through these initiatives is selectively punished by the state.

Finally, Favarel-Garrigues' article considers the role of moral entrepreneurs in Russia to combat paedophilia, which often involves invoking child sexual abuse as a means to openly harass sexual minorities. Its account of the group Occupy Paedophilia speaks to the confluence of conventional and digital vigilantism, as they harness social media to augment the visibility of their targets through the production of content meant to entertain a substantial audience. This account also details the interactions between self-proclaimed 'rule enforcers' and 'rule creators'[33] (Becker, 1963: 147–165) close to the government and promoting legislation against so-called 'non-traditional sexual relations'. While relations between such a group and law-enforcement agencies are conflictual, the case of Occupy Paedophilia also illustrates the competition at stake between rival groups that may target presumed paedophiles through more or less legitimate means.

Through a conceptual and geographical tour informed by case studies, this special issue provides a fine-grained contribution on digital vigilantism that brings a more detailed portrait of the participants, contents and contexts of digital vigilantism. Further work remains to be conducted, and questions remain open, such as the issue of the audiences of digital vigilantism audience (Trottier et al., forthcoming). In the meantime, we hope that this special issue constitutes a preliminary attempt that will generate interest among media, communication, political science, sociology, anthropology and criminology scholars to further develop knowledge on a growing social control phenomenon that has the capacity to dramatically influence relations and trust between social, cultural, religious and political communities.

Notes

1. Garland, *The Culture of Control*.
2. Bayley and Shearing, *The New Structure of Policing*
3. Walsh, "Watchful Citizens."
4. Walsh, "Community, Surveillance and Border Control."
5. Walsh, *Watchful Citizens*, 249.
6. Ibid.
7. Favarel-Garrigues and Gayer, « Violer la loi pour maintenir l'ordre »
8. Brown, *Strain of Violence*.
9. Abrahams, *Vigilant Citizens*; Johnston, "What is Vigilantism?"; Pratten and Sen, *Global Vigilantes*; and Favarel-Garrigues and Gayer, *Violer la loi pour maintenir l'ordre*.
10. Trottier, "Digital Vigilantism as Weaponisation of Visibility."
11. See note 5 above.
12. Trottier, "Digital Vigilantism as Weaponisation of Visibility"; and Reagle, *Reading the Comments*.
13. boyd, *Taken Out of Context*, 34.
14. Reagle, *Reading the Comments*, 79.
15. Moncada, "Varieties of Vigilantism."
16. Douglas, "Doxing: a Conceptual Analysis."
17. Smallridge, Wagner, and Crowl, "Understanding Cyber-vigilantism."
18. Sawaoka and Monin, "The Paradox of Viral Outrage."
19. Trottier, Gabdulhakov and Huang, *Introducing Vigilant Audiences*.

20. Stratton, Powell, and Cameron, "Crime and Justice in Digital Society."
21. Yardley et al., "What's the Deal with 'Websleuthing'?"
22. van Steden, van Caem, and Boutellier, "The 'Hidden Strength' of Active Citizenship."
23. De Benedictis, Orgad, and Rottenberg, "# MeToo, Popular Feminism and the News."
24. Milbrandt, "'Make them famous': Digital Vigilantism and Virtuous Denunciation after Charlottesville"; Colton, Holmes, and Walwema, "From NoobGuides to# OpKKK."
25. Milbrandt, "Caught on Camera, Posted Online."
26. Bjørgo and Mareš, eds., *Vigilantism against Migrants and Minorities*.
27. Kasra, "Vigilantism, Public Shaming, and Social Media Hegemony."
28. Ingraham and Reeves, "New Media, New Panics."
29. Gao and Stanyer, "Hunting Corrupt Officials Online"; and Chia, "Crowd-sourcing Justice."
30. Gabdulhakov, "Citizen-Led Justice in Post-Communist Russia"; and Favarel-Garrigues and Shukan, "Perspectives on Post-Soviet Vigilantism."
31. Johnston, *What is Vigilantism?*
32. Haggerty and Ericson, "The Surveillant Assemblage."
33. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*.

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