

Interview with
Vanessa Codaccioni

LA SOCIÉTÉ DE VIGILANCE

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Vanessa Codaccioni, LA SOCIÉTÉ DE VIGILANCE
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What is the book's point of departure?

My latest book has allowed me to analyze a phenomenon that I had previously set aside, that I called “participative repression” (répression participative). The title, *The Society of Vigilance*, comes from a speech made by President Emmanuel Macron after the attacks on the Paris Police Headquarters in October 2019. He called on the nation to mobilize against the Islamist “hydra,” a statement that fomented a great deal of journalistic comment at the time. Crucially though, in the rest of that speech, Macron called on citizens to surveil each other and denounce any seemingly suspect behavior or attitude. This is the society of vigilance: a society in which public authorities call on citizens to surveil each other, and to denounce or even secretly inform on each other. And this is part of a double movement that is both a reinforcement and a radicalization of anti-terrorism that is then to be found not only at various levels in all social spheres but also in neoliberal governance, which professes that individuals are responsible for their own lives and, in particular, for their own security.

How did you go about writing the book?

What interested me was how Macron's declaration fitted in with a multitude of calls for security and vigilance throughout the world. I came to notice slogans that illustrate this: in the United States, “If you see something, say something”; in Canada, “Si c'est suspect, signalez-le” (“If it is suspicious, report it”); in France, “En signalant un comportement dangereux, vous pouvez éviter qu'un acte criminel soit commis” (“By reporting dangerous behavior, you can prevent a criminal act from being committed”); in the United Kingdom, “See it. Say it. Sorted.” These slogans illustrate perfectly the trend observable since September 11, 2001: from that moment on, it has been considered that citizens play a key role in the fight against terrorism. I also adopted a historical perspective since the hunting of internal enemies, of deviant and abnormal persons, has always existed.

How is this book relevant today?

There exists today a governmentality that operates through the fear exercised on the social body as a whole. The launching of such calls for vigilance make those incited to surveil feel insecure because the other—the Muslim, the delinquent, the drug addict—is a threat. But it also creates fear in the individuals who are surveilled or who feel they are spied on and know that

they could be denounced by their neighbors, their colleagues ... This produces a sense of mutual insecurity that effectively increases the State's capacity to extend its control and surveillance. Fear is at the heart of this society of vigilance. And this fear may even apply in case of children. I try to demonstrate in the final chapter, for example, how active shooter drills in the United States, or safety alert drills in French schools, belong within a society in which one is forever afraid of something that is to occur.