Fear and the City

IRINI MICHA and PENNY KOUTROLIKOU
National Technical University of Athens, Greece

In their special issue on "Fear and the City," Bannister and Fyfe (2001) note that "The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines fear as the emotion of pain or uneasiness caused by the sense of impending danger, and as a state of anxiety derived from the concern for the safety of a person or thing." Bauman (2006, 3–4) enhances this definition by arguing that humans also experience a "second degree" fear, "a fear, so to speak, socially and culturally 'recycled', a 'derivative fear' that guides their behaviour … whether or not a menace is immediately present." This derivative fear refers mostly to feelings of insecurity and vulnerability to danger rather than to reactions to actual threat.

Even before the turn of the millennium, social theorists such as Giddens and Beck were discussing the subject of "risk society," which is preoccupied with safety and places particular emphasis on the ways it deals with insecurities. In the same period, articles and books referring to fear of crime reached close to 1,000. Since then, in the first 15 years of the twenty-first century, the literature concerning fear has soared, reflecting the heightened concern caused by the increased number of wars, crises, epidemics, natural disasters, and terrorist attacks. With the majority of the world's population being urban, the city has become a principal reference in the debates about fear, while its depiction as a place where diversity is experienced and appreciated is increasingly under threat. Today a dominant discourse sees difference as overwhelming and dangerous, to be excluded or segregated where possible – indeed, something to be afraid of. Thus, the discussion about fear and the city is shaped by three interrelated aspects:

- discourses and politics of fear that frame both the objects and causes of fear;
- geographies of fear and the ideologies that underpin the practices of addressing fear at the urban level;
- fear itself including the objects of fear, the causes of fear, and the repercussions of fear on individuals, social groups, and places.

DISCOURSES AND POLITICS OF FEAR

Throughout their history, cities have had to meet their residents' need for protection from danger, be it natural hazards or invaders. Cities excited the human imaginary throughout the nineteenth century. Yet, at the same, they triggered fears about disease, unhealthy living conditions, criminality, as well as civil unrest. These fears were mostly dealt with in two ways: with urban interventions (infrastructure and roads), and with slum clearances and basic housing provisions by the philanthropists to the working classes – coupled with punitive treatment of marginalized groups who were deemed to be the culprits causing these fears. After World War II, the issue of fear and the city attracted less attention. However, gradually – and not unrelated to the numerous crises and the dismantling of the postwar social contract (and welfare state) – the perception of cities changed from being considered relatively

safe places to becoming embodiments of insecurity and danger.

So, from the nineteenth century to the present day, the intermingling of fear with the city has gained ground to the point that it has become one of the major research topics concerning the urban. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that the construction of fear as an urban problem is shaped by economic, social, and political agendas and aims. Thus, the politics of fear (and the discourses and narratives that mobilize them) form a distinct object of inquiry beyond the level of the individual or the focus of crime control.

As several writers argue, the "politics of fear" implies that political actors employ fear in order to manipulate social concerns to achieve their goals, a manipulation which often involves populist and authoritarian political attitudes. The realization of political goals might comprise manipulation of public opinion, direct threat through authoritarian violence, and also diverse fear-based tactics aiming to immobilize public reaction (moral panics, divide and rule, "there is no alternative," etc.), including the strengthening of divisions among social groups and social stakeholders.

Furthermore, fear is also strongly linked to "criminologies of the Other" (Garland 2001), an Other which can be blamed for urban (sociopolitical) problems and which can provide an "easy" policy target for measures to be taken in order to safeguard social safety. Simplistic narratives and stereotype-ridden argumentation tend to appease "public opinion" and thus these "easy" targets become a popular tool of control. Shirlow and Pain (2003, 15) argue that "fear is a term that is controlled via processes of legitimisation, exclusion and prescribed interpretation." Those portrayed as "threatening" Others face multiple exclusions. And conversely, the fears of "deserving citizens" gain legitimacy, providing in this way further justification for

measures taken in order to address the fear caused by the "Others."

As a tactic of power, the politics of fear does not solely involve direct exercise of power or authoritarianism. Crucially, it determines and/or constructs the threat, as well as its interpretation through dominant narratives and discourses which establish "regimes of truth." As such, the politics of fear has the power to affect social perceptions and attitudes and to legitimize measures and policies – to "manufacture consent." As several authors contend, the media play a pivotal role in intensifying the climate of fear and in framing the threat.

Yet, the politics of fear does not remain at an abstract level of governance; rather it is entrenched in urban geographies of fear which have significant repercussions on people and places. Even more, these geographies often become the main goal of the politics and discourse of fear.

URBAN GEOGRAPHIES OF FEAR

From the 1980s, research in the fields of geography, cultural studies, and feminist thought began to highlight the complexity of issues concerning social identities and fear, pointing out that part of the literature on fear and the city is based on a dualism – that certain groups commit crime and others are victims of it – and this dualism applies to the spaces and places in which fear is situated: public versus private, safe versus dangerous, low income estates versus suburbs. Strongly associated with the discourse and politics of fear, fear in the city mostly refers to (a) places and spaces where – alleged or actual – threat(s) are situated (such as deprivation, decay); and (b) social groups upon which urban fears are projected (such as criminality, unhealthiness, social "pathologies"). However, concerning urban geographies of fear, social groups and

places are often interlinked: a place acquires a threatening identity due to the groups living there, while simultaneously individuals become bearers of the "territorial stigma" of the places in which they reside. More often than not, such geographies of fear are applied to deprived neighborhoods where poverty, exclusion, and marginalization are significant, albeit implicit, factors. Recent research has shown that increasing levels of fear correlate with increased visible inequalities and sociospatial segregation.

Dominant discourses and territorial stigmas, as well as situatedness, significantly affect fear in the city. In fact, most references to fear in the city concern deprived housing estates, stigmatized neighborhoods (exemplified by those characterized as ghettos), and public spaces which are shared by strangers. In addition, criminology research has revealed that when a particular kind of crime or a neighborhood is attracting negative police interest, then data about it increase since greater attention is paid to it.

Since fear is often based on social perceptions of threat rather than actual experiences of victimization, different social groups signify and experience fear in the city in diverse and complex ways. Fear of crime in general and the kind of crimes that people are afraid of are shaped by the identities and social categories in which people belong/refer to; categories that also hold a social position which in turns affect their inclusion in or exclusion from the broader society and the significations of their "exposure" to the public space. When these social categories are viewed as social relations that are imbued with unequal power relations and multiple "borders" of inclusion/exclusion, a different and potentially richer understanding of the subjects and places of fear can be attained. At the same time, different research has shown that "other" (hidden) crimes such as domestic violence, acquaintance violence, and elder abuse also have a role to play in the construction of fear.

Fear of the other is also structured according to lived or mediated experiences. The social differentiation of fear is closely reflected in experiences of public spaces, private spaces, national and local territories, and environments; the geographies of fear are clearly bound together with the politics of marginalization and dispossession (Shirlow and Pain, 2003).

However, despite natural disasters and epidemics, crime and fear of crime persists as the major reason for fear in the city. Addressing crime (or fear of crime) in the city has been a major political aim since the 1980s since the inner city was frequently portrayed as the territory of vice and crime. From "eyes on the streets" advocated by Jane Jacobs in *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), the prominent approach to dealing with crime in the city in the 1980s was rooted in the "broken windows" theory (Kelling and Wilson 1982). By emphasizing petty and "environmental" crime, they argued that neglect would result in the collapse of neighborhood control and eventually in becoming a dangerous area. Former mayor of New York Rudy Giuliani's (in)famous "zero tolerance" strategy was mostly based on this theory, and focused on confronting crime that was defined as "antisocial" through increased municipal policing and CCTV surveillance as well as through harsh punitive treatment of petty crime and undesirable social groups such as "beggars, drunks, drug-addicts, rude teenagers, prostitutes, lazy and crazy people" (Kelling and Wilson 1982).

New Urbanism advocates also adhered to the argumentation of broken windows theory and of zero tolerance strategies, by arguing that crime can be controlled through innovative governance measures such as foot patrols, surveillance, and zero tolerance of "environmental" offenses. Defensive

architecture (Davis 1990), surveillance, and criminalization of antisocial behavior went hand in hand with the minimization of welfare and social support and the revanchist desire (Smith 1996) to "reclaim" the inner city urban villages. These questions of fear and security are closely associated with sustained or increased profits from real estate and businesses as well as with an advancement of a consumer type of citizenship where civic identities are experienced mostly in private (and safe) spaces of consumption.

Needless to say, both broken windows theory and zero tolerance strategies were taken up as "best practices" in many cities around the world, where experts were charged with "designing out terror," resulting in "form follows fear." The attacks of September 11, 2001 were a pivotal point in the intensification of securitization and militarization of urban space. Ever since, and with every new terrorist action, sociospatial securitization of urban spaces deepens, along with "states of emergency" that acquire more permanent features.

A number of authors highlight the link between law and order discourse and the desire for harsher repressive measures directed at "geographically bounded populations." Urban policies of control and containment are present in most city strategies, while emergency laws increasingly affect everyday urban life in a permanent way.

Yet, from the 2000s onwards, fear – both inducing fear and addressing fear – has become a pivotal urban strategy as well as a lucrative business. The terror attacks and the subsequent "war on terror" tend to give ever more powers to the police and to challenge, decrease, or violate rights (human, civil, political) in the name of "safety". The discursive construction of fear and safety, especially after terror attacks or international mega events, is even more evident in urban architecture, urban design, public buildings and spaces, as well as policing through increased visible presence and security (even militarization). As Katz (2007) points out, "'banal terrorism' became installed as routine in our collective subconscious, and fear became normal and accepted."

IDEOLOGY OF FEAR

Currently, fear has become an ever present feature of urban life and politics. Fear of crime, of random events (disasters, epidemics), fear of Others as well as fear for one's future, reflect an undercurrent of widespread insecurity that has come to characterize everyday life in cities. With CCTV and other surveillance technologies, defensive architecture, enclosed spaces, increased police presence on the streets, and increasing numbers of carceral institutions, fear and the quest for security are materialized in the fabric of the city. Media and politicians play with everyday fears and imminent threats, intensifying this feeling of fear (and war) being everywhere and cultivating a sense of imminent (state of) emergency.

Manipulating fears is intrinsic in the exercise of power. Thus, fear often becomes a hegemonic technology shaping as well as popularizing and advancing dominant ideologies. On the economic front, selling fear is a profitable enterprise since it covers safeguarding real estate prices all the way to security enterprises. From an everyday perspective, individuals often swing between feeling constantly afraid (and thus they withdraw from the public sphere) and feeling unable to react as a response to overexposure to fears. At the same time, the increased enclosures of the public as a response to fear tend to secure the city *from* the public rather than *for* it, while they drive urban citizenship toward becoming consumer citizenship.

However, there is another pivotal issue which pervades fear and the city: the

opposition between rights and safety. As Robin (2004, 927) puts it, "among the great commonplaces of modern political thought is the opposition between freedom and fear." This false, yet prevalent, dilemma between freedom and safety/security has become timely as well as prominent. "The universal and ineluctable consequence of this crusade to secure the city is the destruction of accessible space" (Davis 1992, 226). Media reports quote "everyday people" who are willing to sacrifice some of their rights for the sake of greater safety. This opposition between rights (human, civic and political, socioeconomic) and security is becoming more and more vital at a time when inequalities persist or increase (in most cities), distance between governments and citizens is growing, and civic resentment (and actions) increases in parallel.

These interlinked aspects of fear in the city formulate "fear as an arena of conflict which needs to be conceived as activity, practice and process rather than object" (Gold and Revill 2003, 34). Despite the widespread political use of fear, dominant discourses insist on presenting fear in the city as an individually rooted subpolitical emotion, a view aligned with prevalent neoliberal ideologies. Therefore, "there is a need to politicize fear and its politics in order to unveil the consequences that such politics have for people and places" (Shirlow and Pain, 2003).

SEE ALSO: Place Politics; Public/Private Space; Spatial Theories/Social Construction of Spaces; Urban Risks and Violence

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