PUBLIC SAFETY

INSECURITY HAS CHANGED OUR LIVES[1]

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1. The glocalisation of insecurity

In the last two decades, local concerns about public safety have been at the top of surveys as an issue that most worries public opinion. They have obtained the most spectacular publicity in the media and, therefore, have also received priority on political agendas.

Likewise, our tendency to always think about better solutions without even considering tackling the root causes of the problem in order to eliminate them (Panikkar, 2002) too often relegates analysing the problem and, therefore, understanding it. This occurs so often that, in practice, the 'problem of insecurity' has become one of the most used, if not the first, resources –without excluding the most brutal demagogy– in political battles (for votes) and media battles (for audiences). A well-informed and clear debate is difficult, if not simply impossible, about the scope of the problem, its causes and, above all, the solutions that are really available. The effects of this unjustifiable shortcoming, far from representing a simple technical anomaly, take on colossal political relevance.

Whether it is the result of the existence of important interests –business, political and economic– directly connected to sustained levels of insecurity or the consequence of the psychosocial predisposition to offload diffuse and accrued anxieties onto a visible, local and easily-accessible object (the scapegoat mechanism) or even more probably, as the perverse synergy of both factors –namely, the conjunction between the interests created in insecurity and the psychosocial need to offload accumulated anxiety– the matter is that the problem of insecurity represents a poorly-formulated problem and poorly-formulated problems, as we know, do not have solutions. Thus, forewarning that we are facing a poorly-formulated problem becomes the prior condition that is absolutely essential for finding an exit from this authentic dead-end street.

In my understanding, there are two main reasons that explain this absurdity.

Firstly, the problem of insecurity is built –due to the state's lack of economic and social commitment (Wacquant, 2006)– breaking off a specific chunk of concerns about safety (insecurity, materialised locally) from the rest (insecurity, which is generated globally). Secondly, the formulation of the problem of insecurity is based on confusion between the objective dimension (the probability of being a victim of personal attack) and the subjective dimension (the widespread fear of crime). Thus, almost without a need to distinguish between real risk and perceived risk –which, despite their clear interconnection, are actually very different–, demands for security (citizens' request for either public or private protection services) rest on a diffuse fear of crime that, despite containing the real risk of being a victim of an attack, takes on its own life, completely separate from the real development of crime indexes.

1.1 Between risk and fear

Without a real increase in criminal activity, the perception of insecurity does not seem to significantly increase. After victimisation increases the feeling of vulnerability, this insecurity acquires an independent and differentiated dynamic in which many more elements may come into play than solely the real spreading of crime. Thus, proper understanding of the phenomenon of insecurity requires that we keep in mind that:

'After consolidated, this world view does not change quickly. It is not affected by the changes that occur year after year in crime rates, even when they entail drops in the real rates of criminal victimisation. This explains the apparent absence of a relationship between crime trends and feelings of fear about crime. Our attitudes towards crime –our fears and bitterness, but also our narratives and typical ways of understanding using common sense- become cultural events that are upheld and reproduced by cultural scripts and not by criminological research or official empirical data' (Garland, 2005).

It is not strange then that those who most experience this feeling of insecurity are not necessarily those social sectors that are genuinely most directly exposed to real risks of personal attack, but rather those that do not have either the resources or the life expectancy to adapt to the vertiginous economic, social and

cultural changes that are shaking the so-called age of globalisation. This is explained because in the shaping of this feeling of insecurity, there are other fears mixed in with the widespread fears of crime (typical, in short, of insecurity) that have nothing to do with real risk to personal security.

In any case, the endurance of this climate of uncertainty associated with the existence of high crime levels seems to reflect –in citizens' eyes– either a lack of desire to confront the problem or, worse still, an inability to do so. The spreading of the signs of social disorder lead individuals to feel at risk (real or perceived) in the region where they live and to even take specific measures to protect it. At this point, there seems to be a dual adaptation mechanism: on the one hand, the social sectors that have the resources to do so leave the places that threaten to enter into the spiral of social disorder and urban decline (Skogan, 1992); on the other, among the sectors that don't have this ability, the growth of feelings of insecurity feeds not only complaints but also punitive attitudes and reactions.

Despite this, the demand for security represents a social issue that cannot, in the end, be reduced to the simple aggregation of individual or group experiences. It therefore requires a political response –in the context of integrated management of cities and their dysfunctions– that can transcend merely technical and repressive responses (Chalom and Léonard, 2001).

At this point, everything points to demands for security in our society being shaped by the perceived risk of crime as an undifferentiated whole –more than on the basis of the real risk of being a victim of a specific type of attack– primarily by part of the sector that is threatened by economic marginalisation, as well as social, cultural, political and ideological marginalisation.

This explains why public policies are mainly focused on responding to demands for security from a fearful public (safety policies), instead of on deactivating the different conflicts that are the source of the different manifestations of crime (social policies). Thus, the vicious circle is complete: unleashed conflicts that generate precariousness in the most vulnerable social sectors; demands for security that

respond to perceived risk before real risk; safety policies that aim to give a fearful public peace of mind without changing the conditions that produce these fears; and, consequently, chronic insecurity .

1.2 Reformulating public safety

The study of the feeling of insecurity (perceived risk) is essential for correctly understanding the phenomenon of insecurity and, therefore, the social structure and the territory establish two basic dimensions, as they have an impact on the unequal distribution of this subjective side of the phenomenon among the public (Curbet et al, 2007).

With regard to social structure, as we have seen, the construction of the phenomenon of insecurity is not only related to the real risk the public experiences of being a victim of crime, but instead depends on many other factors. Among the risk factors, one of the most important is individuals' social positions. This makes them more or less vulnerable to social insecurity. The need for public safety sharpens among those groups with a more vulnerable social status, who experience a greater feeling of insecurity in all areas of life and have fewer resources to confront these risks. Conversely, people equipped with greater protection concede less importance to public safety. This is that sector of the population who enjoy a competitive position in the global economy, are politically integrated, are able to deploy new forms of social relationships and who are aware that they have sufficient resources to control risks.

With respect to the territory, cities and their neighbourhoods are much more than simple urban structures. They are the arena where citizens' social relationships develop, where the positive and negative aspects of coexistence materialise and where the public's fears and safeties are shaped. The perception of insecurity in neighbourhoods tends to be less than in the city. This is because neighbourhoods are close to us and known, while the city is seen as more distant and unknown. The two main arguments that confer security or insecurity to a space are the place itself and the people who frequent it. Both factors translate into a single variable: the social use of the space, a basic element to explain the risk perceived in different territories.

Another factor that may have an impact on perceiving insecurity in public spaces is incivility. This is because the structure of relations and coexistence in neighbourhoods is one of the privileged spheres for researching securities. Furthermore, incivility is a factor that comes into play in perceiving insecurity due to the deterioration of public spaces that is normally entailed. However, the problem of incivility could end up

becoming the scapegoat for a much larger and more disturbing problem: insecurity.

In any case, the problem of insecurity cannot be disassociated from the generalised absence of reliable indicators that make it possible to dimension the different forms of crime correctly, to continue to compare their evolution in different cities, countries and regions and, finally, to measure the real impact of different safety policies. Thus, the need to have reliable indicators on the development of crime and insecurity, more than an exclusively methodological challenge, has become a top political requirement.

As Torrente (2007) describes, there are currently three sources of information for properly understanding the risks to public safety that affect a community: the controllers (police, courts, inspectors, etc.), the victims and the offenders. Clearly, the controllers provide data exclusively related to the problems they manage, which is normally data on the infractions and crimes they process. Victims can relate their experiences, their fears and their safety and security demands. They therefore provide a wide range of data on how unsafety is experienced. Finally, the violators and criminals can talk about their activities, outlooks and intentions. Naturally, these are just the transgressions and crimes that we know about. Different techniques can be used to gather data from each group. The most common include police and legal statistics, victimisation surveys and self-incrimination surveys.

Since they measure different things, each of the sources and techniques employed has its limitations. More than half of penal crimes are not reported and sentences may not even represent 8% of the reports filed. Furthermore, police statistics tend to over-represent 'street crimes' committed by youth, men and low social classes, in detriment to 'white collar' crimes. In turn, it is hard for victimisation surveys to capture events with group victims, such as environmental crimes or those committed by organisations and professions. Finally, self-incrimination surveys have serious problems with no responses. As a whole, the different sources tend to over-represent the infractions and crimes committed on public streets and to under-represent other types of crime. Thus, there is really no ideal source or technique for evaluating public safety. This is so true that sociologists and criminologists tend to use different sources in these analyses. Even with the aforesaid limitations, victimisation surveys are the technique that provides a vision that is closest to the general public's reality, so that they tend to be used as a base for subjective insecurity indicators, namely, to measure perceived risk.

An added difficulty in analysing insecurity rests not only in the lack of suitable indicators, but also in their own limitations. As selecting them always implies a choice, they cannot be exempt from theoretical and political controversies.

Despite all these limitations, which are, moreover, inevitable, we must understand that the priority task consists of reformulating the problem of insecurity (associated exclusively with the danger of street crime) in the context of global social insecurity, in terms that make it possible to deal with it without costs that are unsustainable for freedom and justice.

2. The governance of public safety

The selection and implementation of technically-viable policies and practices (namely, executable ones) and politically sustainable ones (socially acceptable) presupposes the existence of certain social, political and cultural conditions for their realisation. The interaction, inevitably paradoxical, between the freedom of individual and responsible action by the players and the decisive influence of social, political and cultural conditions is inescapable.

In the last quarter of the 20th century in industrialised societies, the field of crime control and criminal justice underwent –if not a complete collapse or break– a crisis that rattled some of its basic mainstays (danger) and gave rise to a series of adaptable responses whose effects have made it into the modern day (opportunity). According to Garland, this is when the social and criminological scenario was shaped in which our new public policies must be deployed. It was marked, especially in the last third of the 20th century, by two fundamental social events: the standardisation of high crime levels and the recognised limitations of state criminal justice. Jointly, they gave rise to a third event that is just as important: the erosion of the myth –a founding principle of modern states– according to which sovereign states are able to generate law and order and control crime within their territorial limits.

At the beginning of the 90s, when the progression of crime rates that started in the 60s in industrialised societies seemed to have reached a plateau, the crime rates against property and violent crimes recorded were 10 times higher than 40 years earlier. However, don't forget that the rates in the years after World War Two were already double or triple those registered in the period between wars. Thus, between the 1960s and 1990s, a series of phenomena developed around crime: increased and widespread fear of crime, routine behaviour to prevent it, omnipresent and generalised cultural and media 'awareness of crime'. People no longer considered high crime rates

as a temporary disaster and started to deem it a normal risk that had to be constantly kept in mind. Thus, firstly, the contemporary experience of crime is set forth –based on a new fearful awareness of the inevitability of high crime rates– in a series of cultural assumptions and group representations that not even a drop in crime rates seems able to change.

Intimately connected to the standardisation of high crime rates, and practically in parallel, a second determining event occurred in the shaping of the contemporary experience of crime: the recognised limits of state criminal justice. Until the end of the 1960s, criminal justice institutions seemed capable of suitably resolving the challenges posed by the sustained increase in registered crime rates. However, in the 1980s and the beginning of the 90s, a clear feeling of failure in criminal justice agencies was seen and an increasingly explicit recognition of the state's limitations in controlling crime.

This outlook, somewhat buried in official circles, became much more strident in public opinion that forthrightly stated their critical position about criminal justice (particularly the actions of courts and judges). They were accused of passing down sentences that were too indulgent and not concerned enough about public safety. In this climate of mistrust about the ability of criminal justice, public policies deem it more realistic to confront the effects of crime than to tackle the problem itself.

2.1 The crisis of state crime control

This leads us to expect a collision between these two facts –standard high crime rates and recognised limitations of the state criminal justice system– to realise that 'the king has no clothes'. The state's capacity to duly comply with its aim to govern different aspects of social life was questioned on several fronts. However, the structural depth of this inability had yet to be unveiled. Neither temporary nor partial, the lack of expertise to generate the expected levels of crime control made the magnitude of state failure blatantly clear.

The erosion of the state's ability to impose law and order and control crime within its borders undoubtedly represents a truth that is extremely difficult for government authorities to take on. They are aware of the enormous costs that would be entailed in abandoning their pretension of being the exclusive providers of public safety. The flip side of acknowledging the dangers is the failure of institutions, which would have to be justified by the lack of dangers (Beck, 2008).

However, in reality trust in public power to control crime is –as Robert (2003) reminds us– a relatively recent invention, and even more so in social practices than in the dialogues of state lawyers. It is no surprise then that this is a fragile trust that needs very little to erode it. And no excessive sensitivity is needed to perceive, under the fine layer of the contemporary criminal system, the persistent ancestral beating of fear, power, violence and revenge.

Thus, the slow, difficult march forward of the pace of humanitarian reforms in the field of crime control and criminal justice should be no surprise. Conversely, the apparent ease with which we return to punitive principles and strategies that, to enlightened souls, may have seemed definitively ended in a bygone age.

For the purposes of identifying the changes that have occurred in controlling crime, Garland (2005) suggests taking two sets of transformative forces into account. Firstly, the social, economic and cultural changes that characterise late modernity. These changes were experienced unequally by all Western industrialised democracies after World War Two and, more sharply, starting in the 1960s. Secondly, the combination of economic neo-liberalism and social conservatism guided the public policies unleashed in response to these changes and, likewise, responded to the crisis of the welfare State.

Following Garland, it became clear that the changes that happened in the field of crime control and criminal justice during the last half of the 20th century are certainly due to the combined actions of political decision taking, designers of public policies, criminologists and opinion shapers. However, these are only explained by also considering –as an essential condition– the changes made in social structure and the cultural sensitivities that made these types of public policies both possible (technically) and desirable (by the sectors most influenced by the electorate).

Certainly, in the change of millennium, the endurance of the structural elements typical of capitalist and democratic modernity and the unfolding of deep transformations in economic, political, social and cultural arenas have both converged. They have affected the global economic markets and the national state systems and even the basic conditions that govern the lives of individuals and families. These changes, both due to their scope and their intensity, could not help but substantially alter the area of crime control and criminal justice.

In any case, whatever the result may be, the action of criminal justice is condemned, due to its very nature, to generating dislike and, at times, disillusion and even frank hostility in some of the parties involved in the process. For example, measures must be taken about dangerous individuals, and criminals must even be released that are reincorporated into communities after their sentences have been served. Under these conditions, the different players watch each other mistrustfully and are generally sceptical about the overall efficacy of the criminal justice system. Thus, it is not strange that the state device for controlling crime continues is viewed more as part of the problem of insecurity than a solution by a large part of the population (Garland, 2005).

2.2 Tension between politicians and administrators

In no case can this be seen to justify a determinist reduction of the options available –both to the agencies and the authorities in the criminal justice system– for responding to these aforesaid changes and, thus, for deploying significantly different strategies. The leading role and, thus, the responsibility of the players in the changes that occurred in crime control and criminal justice in this last half century are unquestionable in resolving problems that were successively posed.

The governments have deployed two broad strategies that are schizophrenically aimed at opposing objectives. On the one hand, they promote institutional reforms and public policies addressed, in one way or another, at surpassing the proven limits of criminal justice and making the community co-responsible for the preventive control of crime (communitarian strategy). On the other, the elected government employees – faced with difficulties in adapting public policies to an inconvenient reality– frequently react in a politicising way, either by denying the evidence and reconfirming the state myth of exclusive state control of crime or by signing up for law and order formulas from electoral results, which are tempting but have unpredictable social results (punitive populism).

The increase and chronification of the registered high crime rates starting in the 1960s certainly significantly alarmed the main criminal justice agencies (the police, courts, prisons). The shrinking resources to confront increased demand must be added to the increased workloads of the criminal justice system (crimes reported to the police, investigations done, trials held, imprisoned criminals). As seen, criminal justice started to be viewed as part of the problem, more than as part of the solution. The anxiety caused by fear of losing the public's trust also caused different, and not always complementary, reactions in the two principal groups of institutional players: the politicians and the administrators.

For political players, moving in the electoral competence setting, political decisions are strongly conditioned by the requirement to adopt effective short-term measures, which are popular and are not interpreted by public opinion

as showing weakness or neglecting state responsibilities. Thus, political decisions in the area of crime control and insecurity inevitably tend to seek over-the-top showiness, when not simple sensationalism, and to avoid being accused of not being in touch with 'common sense' at any price, by either the political opposition or the media (Garland, 2005).

Conversely, for administrative players, in charge of managing the agencies of the criminal justice system, the demands typical of public relations and the political arena are also important and act as external constraints in taking decisions, although these are not essential considerations in the day to day work governing administrators' decision taking. Despite having to obey the laws and directives enacted by politicians, the latter group is viewed by administrators as an external and problematic force, with other interests and agendas, more than as an integrating part of the organisation.

Thus, in this setting of growing pressure in the criminal justice system, a conflictive relationship is shaped between politicians –accustomed to considering public policy proposals depending on their political allure and with respect to other political positions– and administrators – obligated to focus on the interests typical of the organisation they are running. This makes the existence clear of two dialogues based on different versions of the crisis of crime control, as well as the reasoning, interests and strategies that are hard to reconcile, making it extremely difficult to draft effective public policies.

This structural tension between politicians and administrators is particularly visible, with particular virulence, when crisis situations, on the one hand, put people under immense pressure and cause emotional reactions and, on the other, flood organisational designs of the agencies that are called to confront the different types of crisis. This may be the case with the police, fire-fighters or the army (Boin, 2007). This may be even truer in a field of governability so replete with conflicts as the criminal justice system. Cases must be handled every day with high public visibility and emotional stress that put the state capacity to uphold order to the test.

2.3 Public opinion and the media

This new scenario has not only altered the agreed roles of institutional players (politicians and administrators) and, in particular, the police, but has also granted a leading role to a varied group of new players, previously inconceivable in the field of crime control. As Roché (2004) stressed, this has gone so far that the possible coordination of these different levels of administration and the new players are one of the crucial aspects of the governance of public safety.

As we saw, the combined effect of the standardisation of high crime rates and the recognised limitations of state criminal justice explains the crisis in state crime control. This has impacted not only the criminal justice agencies, but has also naturally and deeply impacted public opinion.

It is not only about the loss of trust in the state's power to effectively control crime but, beyond an intense yet fleeting bad mood, in the shaping of a new 'common sense', particularly upheld in the middle classes, emotionally identified with the victims of crime, belligerent against offenders' rights and deeply critical of the actions of criminal justice.

However, don't forget that 'common sense' attitudes are too often characterised by a totalitarian outlook that seeks refuge in an explosive blend of frivolous suppositions and ideological dogmas. These converge in a rigid demand for justice and punishment –in reality nothing more than vengeance– as well as protection at any price.

Outlined in this way, the problem of insecurity clearly has no solution. Crushed by their own weight, the simultaneous application of each and every one of these absolute principles becomes simply and totally impossible. This can be understood even better when these inflexible demands are compared to the limited resources made available to criminal justice, the legal requirements for proof, the action capacity of the defence and the possibilities of making deals about the sentence. It is therefore not easy to stop the general public from being frequently incapable of understanding criminal justice decisions that, in many of these cases, scandalise them.

However, when referring to public opinion in the information age, we must take the complex yet important role into account that is exercised by the mass media and, above all, television –established as a central institution of modernity in the second half of the 20th century– in shaping contemporary common sense, related to crime control and criminal justice contained in public opinion.

The influence of the media on insecurity is the object of a debate that shows no signs of being close to reaching a satisfactory conclusion. On the one hand, there are no elements that allow the theory to be fundamentally upheld that reduces public opinion practically to a mere media creation. At the other extreme, media participation, in shaping popular perceptions about crime, cannot be limited to a simple function of mirroring reality. Not so much or so little. And, probably, a bit of each of these attributes that are so roundly attributed to the media, but to a just degree.

Above all, we can't forget that the mass media, in a media society, are positioned

on dual and complementary spheres of power: economic (they are increasingly part of large sales corporations – progressively transnational– that fight fiercely, in the information and entertainment market, to obtain maximum profits by exploiting the maximum audiences) and political (they need political power that is essential for their survival). In other words, just in case any doubt remained, communication media does not exactly represent what it seems to literally announce by its name: a simple means (without any self-interest) that would be limited to informing about –as they like to proclaim– 'what is happening' without adding anything or taking anything away.

This essay is not the place to consider the legitimacy of self-interests (commercial and political) that the mass communication media can defend in each case, particularly television. Even less can we turn to the always seductive 'conspiracy theory' in order to close the door on the complex role played by the media in shaping 'common sense' on crime control with a simple explanation. It must be pointed out that, in the increasingly competitive market of info-entertainment, it is not about attending to material needs but psychological ones and, therefore, the challenge consists of offering media products aimed at satisfying desires and channelling fears. And if it is about satisfying desires and fears, then the raw material of communicational business, particularly in its audiovisual variant, can be no other than a constant succession of new features (overwhelming, surprising, thrilling, disturbing and, even more, terrifying) at any price (Gil Calvo, 2006).

There is no need to repeat a clear fact here: the communication media do not cause high crime rates or erode trust in the state ability to control crime. However, there is absolutely no need to be limited to simply stating this. To Margaret Thatcher 'society does not exist' and, conversely, many sociologists believe –in an 'inverted Thatcherism'– that nothing exists that is not society (Beck, 2008). 'Common sense' on crime control is, in the end, a psycho-social construction, namely, a process by which an individual, in interaction with many others, forms or adheres to a specific view about how crime control and criminal justice work. And in modern-day society, the process for shaping this 'common sense' includes the media as an indispensable factor. Lagrange (Robert, 2003) formulates this in suggestive balanced terms: the media reflects worries that it has not created, crystallisation points about emblematic violent acts and their influence on the perception of insecurity among citizens only arises when there is consonance between the reader's or viewer's experience and the media message.

A dual specific impact must be added to the shaping of contemporary 'common sense' with regard to crime control and criminal justice in the media revolution that, starting in the 1960s, changed social relations and cultural sensibilities, which was led at first by the mass-circulation newspapers, then by radio and finally by television. The global success of mass media and the consequent cosmopolitan perspective made the limits of the local information markets explode that had previously been kept fragmented and relatively stagnant –centred on specific ethnic, social and cultural realities– and, with this, it brought risks and specific problems home to everybody that before had been quite isolated and could not feed a widespread and global insecurity. In the territorially indiscriminate depiction of crime at a global level –through mass communication media– we can all feel exposed not only to real risks that correspond to local criminal activity, but also to perceived risks that are nourished from undifferentiated narration, through global media, of problems that affect social groups and territories that are very different from each other.

This homogenisation of the communicational space not only facilitates global propagation –beyond local and direct shared experience– of widespread insecurity (the perception that we can all be victims of any crime), de-territorialised (the perception that anything can happen anywhere) and, thus, disturbing (the perception that even the most aberrant crimes are the problem of everybody). Television becomes the showcase that shows everybody new lifestyles and the corresponding consumption patterns that at the hour of truth, in the real access possibilities, are limited exclusively to a restricted social sector. This has the corresponding perturbing effect for broad sectors of the public who see themselves as trapped in the cruel mixed signal that biologist Jean Rostand [1986] attributes to false liberalism: *'Leave all the doors open, but fiercely prohibit them from entering'*.

3. Conclusion

Insecurity is not group neurosis, as some claim. Neither does it necessarily correspond to a constant and omnipresent increase of all criminal acts. Not so much or so little.

There is a crucial fact that has spotlighted the insecurities of contemporary society: the explosion in the last 30 years of the misnamed petty crime, namely, thefts and robberies, as well as personal assaults. This reality, which doesn't seem easy to elude, explains a good part of the fear of crime that has become one of the main citizen concerns and, even more, has remained there so tenaciously.

The persistent resistance of authorities and the police to accept this clear

fact seems much more surprising: crime against property and people has increased practically at the same pace as the mass-consumption society has unfolded and, in particular, personal assets of great economic and symbolic value (i.e. iPhones, mobile phones, laptops, automobile accessories, etc.). This pace has been exponential.

At the other extreme, the prosperous private security industry constantly turns to alarmist, albeit effective, marketing: save yourself if you can! (In other words, whoever has the resources needed to pay for individual protection). And meanwhile, the media has not delayed in discovering the dramatic and spectacular nature of crime. It has clearly taken on a growing protagonism in the global info-entertainment industry.

At this point, it is practically unavoidable to mention an obvious fact: *What would be left of supply (both of the private security industry and the communication media) without the existence of demand (not just latent but active) for security, if not at almost any price (both in economic terms and in terms of loss of freedom)?* You may ask yourself, who doesn't see how many indignities we are still willing to accept, for example, when walking through airport security controls.

It may be more balanced to adopt the most integral vision possible of the phenomenon of insecurity that evades the Manichaean and simplifying temptation from which no-one is exempt. Asking ourselves some pertinent questions may help us.

What came first, the egg (the demand for safety and security) or the chicken (the supply of security and safety)? We know that one would be nothing without the other. Thus, by understanding one of them, we not only understand the other but, even more importantly, we see the whole in their complete web of operation.

Also, *what dimension is more relevant in the phenomenon of insecurity: objective (crime) or subjective (fear of crime)?* Without high crime levels, it would be difficult to obtain equally high levels of fear of crime. This is clear, although victimisation surveys also tell us that after the generic fear of crime is shaped (that doesn't specify being the victim of a clear and immediate crime), it does not evolve in parallel to criminal reality. This means that crime may drop at a certain time and in a certain place, but this does not lead to the corresponding and automatic decrease of the fear associated with crime. And vice-versa, clearly.

This could lead us to pose a third question: *Is insecurity made up exclusively of fear of crime or does it catalyse other fears that might have no other outlet through which we can express them?* Global uncertainties and

insecurities typical of our era are colossal (climate change, need we say more?) and widespread (it seems like it affects others right now or still hasn't appeared in its most extreme nature) and in many cases locally perceived as remote in time and/or space (that doesn't happen here!). Totally conversely, thieves and offenders are perfectly identifiable figures, individual and pursuable. They can be brought to justice and, ultimately, can be punished. Furthermore, a robbery or attack is a concrete, tangible, imaginable and provable action that can be recorded and handled statistically. What a difference from this throng of diffuse risks, for which we have nothing more than debatable signs, despite everything or maybe because of it, we arrive at the source not always aware of contemporary uncertainty and insecurity! Insecurity seems to be invented to facilitate the essential crystallisation of a specific, close and visible object of this throng of uncertainties and insecurities that so seriously threaten social cohesion.

In the risk society, the demand for public safety is configured more as based on the perception of insecurity existing in public opinion than in criminal reality. This explains how governments generally react sporadically to the outbursts of fear about crime, instead of responding in a well-reasoned and reasonable way to the development of crime. Here is the apparent paradox. On the one hand, institutional reforms and public policies are promoted that are aimed, in one way or another, at surpassing the proven limits of criminal justice and making the community co-responsible in crime prevention control (communitarian strategy) and, on the other, elected government employees –faced with difficulties in adapting public policies to the inconvenient reality– often react by politicising, either by denying evidence and re-affirming the state myth of exclusive state control of crime or by signing up to law and order formulas based on tempting electoral results, but with unpredictable social effects (punitive populism).

This fact would explain the coincidence between public opinion, the media and government authorities in the lack of appreciation stated for the analysis of the causes that would notify on the origin of the different criminal manifestations and, consequently, also the scarce attention paid to the need of having more reliable indicators than we now have. All together, they ineludibly lead us to persist with public policies for public safety based more on the often incomprehensible variations in public opinion instead of on reliable and updated knowledge about the evolution of crime. Despite knowing the limitations well and even the costs and contraindications, we keep on waiting to react instead of preventively anticipating via prudent behaviours which could possibly let us minimise the risks of criminal victimisation.

Persisting with this erratic behaviour, marked more by variations in the insecurity manifested by public opinion and not in criminal reality, does not sketch a hopeful horizon for essential safety and, totally conversely, opens up new questions that end up questioning the nature of public good that we have seen suitable to attribute to safety. *Shouldn't safety be transformed into a good that is bought instead of a service that we expect from the public administrations?*, asks Ulrich Beck. In any case, the apparently consistent barriers between public and private safety do seem to hastily fade away.

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1 A very extensive version of this article can be found at Curbet, J. (2010). *El rei nu: Una anàlisi de la (in)seguretat ciutadana.*

MANAGING PUBLIC SAFETY

POLICIES ON PUBLIC SECURITY[1]

Francesc Guillén Lasierra

1. The public security system. The need for political decisions that define a system with interdisciplinary ramifications

Public security was always considered a field that was reserved for the police, who were responsible for guaranteeing it. The criminal justice system was also attributed some functions in this field: sentencing criminals and dissuading those who had not yet gone along this path. Thus, the criminal code, justice and the police all had to guarantee different areas of public security. Indeed, the concept has not always historically been the same. In other eras, we spoke more of upholding the socio-political status quo and public order, rather than of public security. However, we will not enter these polemics, which have already been sufficiently handled and studied[2].

It has been several decades since the first research projects on security with minimum thoroughness were carried out. They put on the table that security was something more than simply combating crime, as citizens' perception of security was not also correlated with crime indexes (the first victimisation surveys clearly revealed this[3]). On the other hand, other equally-reliable research has posed that there are social, environmental and individual factors that make committing criminal activities more or less difficult[4]. Both in the first case (perception of security/insecurity) and the second (factors that have an impact on crime), it seemed clear that the police and the criminal justice system were not enough players to tackle the challenge of public

security with guaranteed success. The second half of the 20th century provided paradigmatic examples of this shortage, because crime increased in line with the increased numbers of police and justice administration (paradigmatically in the 80s)[5]. Recently, we have been verifying that an increased number of inmates in prison does not lead to a reduction in statistics on criminal activities[6].

This feeling of failure was accentuated by the appearance of zones, of neighbourhoods, where public security operators had lost control of the situation. These are regions where the police can't even enter with minimum guarantees of security. They are frequently areas and spaces where people and groups congregate in extremely disadvantaged economic and social situations, often originating from foreign emigration, varying from country to country. France speaks of the population from the Maghreb, while Germany has a large Turkish population and the United States has its Hispanic population. Those are zones that have suffered a marginalisation process that can even cause the appearance of serious public order problems like what happened in France in 2005. But this is not the only setting where we find spirals of tension and unrest that lead to areas that the state is unable to control. Political and institutional crises accompanied by populist policies have also had tragic consequences in this direction. At this time, there are countries such as, for example, Venezuela, that have entered into a negative spiral in which express kidnappings and murders are the order of the day, with figures exceeding a hundred deaths per week due to this type of crimes. The police not only cannot confront this type of problem, but are the victims in many cases, particularly because some of their members are pressured and influenced by criminal networks (if they do not directly form part of them). Anyway the state is losing the battle in those spaces.

The end of the 20th century coincided with the consolidation of a trend to change in our societies. The growing internationalisation of the large problems and their hypothetical solutions, as well as the growing mobility of the population, the risks of post-industrialisation, the reappearance of organised political violence that is increasingly global, the periodic appearance of economic crises, the endurance of climate change, which is causing large-scale disasters (floods, underwater quakes, etc.) have all greatly expanded the scope of security and led to the appearance of the concept of risk society[7]. This concept has nothing to do with crime. It starts from the premise that our societies (and their citizens) are subjected to a large number of risks to both their people and heritage. It is the function of public powers to manage this risk in order to keep it within the limits

that can be assumed by the population. Current victimisation and security surveys have revealed that when citizens are asked about what worries them, top responses include the economic crisis, immigration and international terrorism.

All these factors have caused a radical change in the concept of public security, as crime can no longer be the focus of our talks on security, despite forming part of it. Public security becomes a broader and more complex idea which includes different fields. As we will see later, they refer to quality of life, coexistence, space planning, good conflict resolution devices and, moreover, good police and justice services.

The resulting definition may seem extraordinarily broad, just like the concept of human security primarily used in the setting of the United Nations, which will be necessary to map out. In any case, we will also need to take other factors and other players into account in order to design policies that respond to the main challenges for security, different from the police force and the criminal system, even though they continue to be relevant players.

At some time, most states have tried, with different degrees of intensity and different modes, to draw up responses or plans with a cross-cutting nature to confront security problems. Awareness is rising that, without taking all aforesaid areas into account, it will frankly be very difficult to confront the modern challenges involving security.

The suitability, or lack thereof, of creating integrated and complex systems for dealing with security is not an absolute truth. Rather, it depends on the ideologies and the values that are the foundation for security policies. In broad strokes, there are basically two large ideological blocks that can be simplified as:
a) Those that believe that citizens are perfectly free to choose between acting in an upright manner and breaking the law (creating threat and insecurity as a consequence). Those who decide not to follow the rules of the game must be punished and this punishment re-establishes security, intimidating possible future offenders. Any other response by public powers would be pernicious, as it would entail promoting or stimulating criminal activity and fear to crime.
b) Those who think that insecurity, offences, crimes, even if in their final execution they are the result of individual decisions, occur in the framework of specific spatial, social and even political contexts. From this viewpoint, security or the lack thereof would be combated by trying to modify the settings and the circumstances that facilitate them.

The first model would involve backing the police and penitentiary system and