THE FEAR AND INSECURITY OF LIVING IN THE CITY

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze aspects related to the fear and insecurity of living in urban environments, exploring their possible relationship with human behavior and globalized media content. Based on the three pillars of sustainability, the research is developed from the perspective of the social pillar, focusing specifically on the feeling of urban insecurity. According to the insights of Freud and Bauman, fear tends to be amplified by the dissemination of bad news, which leads some individuals to isolate themselves and invest in protective and security measures. Classical authors are referenced in an effort to portray humans as "political animals," endowed with "souls full of passions," who may be inclined toward crime and the violation of others' rights in their pursuit of power and wealth. The study seeks to demonstrate that the feeling of insecurity is not necessarily related to a real increase in crime, but rather to the dissemination of biased media content that fuels, among other things, the private security market. Finally, the study argues that the State must become more present, punishing wrongdoers exemplarily and restoring a sense of safety, so that upright citizens can live without fear of their neighbors.

Keywords: Sustainability. City. Insecurity. Fear.

1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout the development of Society, and following various setbacks, the notion of sustainability has emerged as an effective approach to preserving the surrounding environment and the planet. According to Hülse (2020), sustainability is structured around three main pillars: environmental, economic, and social.

This research, conducted through an exploratory bibliographic review, adopts a focus on the

social pillar, without addressing the environmental and economic aspects directly. The study begins by acknowledging the wide range of actions required within the social domain, including poverty and hunger eradication, reduction of inequalities, access to health and education, peace, justice, and others, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda. Specifically, it seeks to explore fear and insecurity among urban populations, particularly the fear of harm posed by others, in an effort to identify strategies for reducing such anxieties and restoring a sense of safety.

Desires such as happiness, freedom, and peace are among the most deeply sought by individuals, yet are not fully attainable in societal life due to the presence of regulatory constraints. Consequently, the optimal path is to live within permitted boundaries while remaining aware of the risks posed by those who transgress such limits.

To support the present analysis, references are drawn from major thinkers, including Aristotle, Hobbes, Descartes, and Bauman, in an effort to place the human being at the center of the discussion, as both a subject who experiences fear and an agent who instills it in others.

This study holds theoretical and social relevance, offering philosophical reflections on human nature and suggesting possible strategies for improving public perceptions of safety. These contributions may serve both academic inquiry and public understanding.

FEAR OF LIVING IN SOCIETY

In a globalized and fast-paced information environment, negative news, often concerning violence and criminality, is widely disseminated, regardless of its veracity. Such dissemination generates fear and insecurity, prompting individuals, when able, to retreat behind walls guarded by security personnel and electronic surveillance systems (BAUMAN, 2021).

These globally circulated reports of violence and crime create the impression that such events are taking place in close proximity, even when they have occurred on distant continents. This is one of the consequences of real-time, globalized media. As a result, "life in cities is increasingly becoming a state of nature characterized by the rules of terror and the omnipresent fear that accompanies it"[4] (BAUMAN, 2021, p. 61).

Such conditions generate profound discomfort. Regarding human suffering, Freud (1997 apud BAUMAN, 2021, p. 14) was categorical in stating that "the fear of suffering and fear itself" are among the most painful experiences endured by individuals.

This perspective is easily understood, as human beings are inherently fragile when compared

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[4] All direct quotations originally written in Portuguese have been translated by the authors for the purposes of this article, with every effort made to preserve the original meaning and intent of the cited authors.

to other animals. As Aristotle (2017, p. 31) observed, the human being is by nature "a political animal," destined to live in society and distinguished by the gift of speech and the capacity to discern between good and evil, the useful and the harmful, and the just and the unjust. Owing to this fragility, humans form communities to overcome challenges and to facilitate survival.

From these unions arise families, followed by villages, and ultimately, cities, established with the goal of meeting human needs and "ensuring basic subsistence" (ARISTOTLE, 2017, p. 7). However, cities, which were originally built to provide security for all their inhabitants, are increasingly associated with danger (BAUMAN, 2021, p. 40), largely due to human conduct.

Human beings are complex entities, alike in body and spirit but differing in the soul, the seat of knowledge, feelings, and desires, or what Descartes (1979) referred to as the passions of the soul. This idea is supported by examples such as identical twins, who, despite their genetic similarity, eventually pursue divergent paths in life, sometimes even becoming antagonistic to one another.

These passions, particularly the desire to possess, generate restlessness. Aristotle (2017, p. 76) noted that "the greed of humanity is insatiable." When something is intensely desired, regardless of the motive, action is often taken to obtain it, even at the expense of legal or moral norms. According to Aristotle, "necessity is not the only incentive to crime; people also seek pleasure, striving for things beyond life's basic needs, and thus commit crimes" (ARISTOTLE, 2017, p. 75).

This desire for possession extends into various domains, including the pursuit of power. Hobbes (2012) identified "a perpetual and restless desire for power after power, that ceases only in death," adding that "competition for riches, honor, and other forms of power leads to conflict, enmity, and war. The means one competitor uses to achieve their desires include killing or subjugating, surpassing or repelling others" (HOBBES, 2012, p. 84).

In the face of these dynamics of aggression and defense, individuals often submit to situations they would not normally accept, compelled by fear in particular circumstances. As Wermuth (2018, p. 5) noted, "the general feeling of insecurity that characterizes contemporary societies significantly increases the fear of becoming a victim of a 'traditional' crime."

As previously stated, this perception of insecurity is frequently exacerbated by media content, which can "turn entirely sui generis cases into paradigms, expanding the catalogue of fears and, in simplistic and marketable discourse, fueling popular clamor for harsher punitive intervention" (WERMUTH, 2018, p. 16–17). This implies tha "the consequence of the 'mediatization of the fear of crime' is its influence on politics, resulting in the formulation of laws that, responding to media-driven demands, increasingly extend the reach of criminal law into social life" (WERMUTH, 2018, p. 19).

This reflects a fear generated by speculative dissemination of violent content, which does not necessarily indicate an actual increase in crime. However, in practical terms, it is true that "public

policies aimed at progressively reducing penal repression, combined with the inefficiency of the penal system, result in increased violence and, consequently, greater social demand for the expansion of criminal law" (BITENCOURT, 2023, p. 50).

Regarding the role of the State in applying punitive laws, it is sufficient to acknowledge the significant influence of media and popular pressure in prompting changes to behavioral standards. It is essential to recognize that these elements function as part of a broader system, and that unscrupulous actors may exploit individual vulnerabilities for personal gain. In other words, where there is no war, weapons are not sold; where there is no fear, security systems and private protection services have no market. Michaud (1989, p. 33–34) observed that "the rise in criminality does not necessarily correspond to an increase in violence or threats to life." However, because of the correlation between the two, the intentional dissemination of data without proper clarification tends to intensify public feelings of vulnerability and fear.

To clarify Michaud's point, it is important to emphasize that violence and criminality are not synonymous. Many offenses, such as tax evasion, fraud, defamation, and embezzlement, are non-violent in nature. Similarly, certain violent acts may not constitute crimes if they fall within legal exclusions. These distinctions fall outside the scope of the present study.

The propagation of false beliefs and their repetition by individuals can be attributed to the disordered state of contemporary life, whether due to excessive responsibilities or disregard for social developments, both stemming from a high degree of individualism. Hobbes highlighted this phenomenon: "Ignorance of causes predisposes individuals to credulity, leading them to believe even in impossibilities. Lacking contrary evidence, they accept such beliefs as truth, unable to perceive their falsehood." He further noted that "credulity, especially when people converse in groups, fosters lies; ignorance, even without malice, leads individuals to believe and repeat falsehoods, at times even inventing them" (HOBBES, 2012, p. 89).

The pursuit of more, power, wealth, influence, coupled with manipulation, represents the exercise of certain passions of the soul. These impulses must be restrained by laws enacted by the State, which is legitimized to impose such controls through what contract theorists refer to as the "social contract." This framework is essential to maintain peace. As Aristotle (2017, p. 223) asserted, "citizens ought to be responsible for one another, and no one should be permitted to act solely according to their own will, for where absolute freedom is permitted, nothing restrains the inherent evil within human beings."

Absolute freedom is incompatible with social life, as "if everyone exercises all the rights they claim, war will reign among men" (HOBBES, 2012, p. 108). Therefore, firm and effective rules, enforced by State coercion, are necessary to restrain the unbridled passions of human nature. "In the

absence of a common power capable of maintaining order among individuals, the result is a condition described as war, a war of every man against every man" (HOBBES, 2012, p. 104).

Peace or war depends on individual desires and the resistance encountered in fulfilling them. "The passions that incline individuals toward peace are fear of death, desire for the things necessary to a comfortable life, and the hope of achieving them through personal effort" (HOBBES, 2012, p. 107).

Once again, it is worth emphasizing the strength of the passions, which may render even the most virtuous individuals irrational. This underscores the importance of legal frameworks to curb such behaviors (ARISTOTLE, 2017).

Written law exists to restrict the unbounded conduct permitted under natural law. Without it, peace cannot be achieved. In Hobbes's words, "law was therefore created to limit the natural freedom of individuals, preventing them from harming one another and instead encouraging mutual aid and unity against common threats" (HOBBES, 2012, p. 215).

In many circumstances, moral restraints alone prove insufficient to prevent misconduct, as failures in self-control and rationality occur. Consequently, "it becomes necessary to rely on organizing and punitive rules under the responsibility of the State and its instruments of control (family, school, church, military, etc.)" (MARCONDES; HÜLSE, 2019, p. 84).

When addressing the concept of freedom, it becomes relevant to consider the closely related notion of security. These two values, both essential and highly desired, may be balanced to varying degrees, but never entirely reconciled without friction (BAUMAN, 2003, p. 10). To illustrate this dichotomy metaphorically, one might imagine a sound equalizer knob: in its central position, the output is balanced, but turning it in one direction increases one frequency while decreasing the other. Likewise, greater freedom tends to reduce security, while heightened security often restricts freedom. Another analogy might liken the community to a container, such as a bowl, where increasing the volume of one ingredient, be it security or freedom, inevitably reduces the available space for the other.

Reinforcing this inherent tension between security and freedom, Dias (2016) states that "without security, there can be no freedom, and where security is excessive, freedom has no room to exist." Applying this principle to collective life, the author adds that "community provides security, but suppresses individuality and autonomy; conversely, the dismantling of community allows for freedom of choice, yet produces a sense of insecurity and fear of the unknown" (DIAS, 2016, p. 93).

From this perspective, in a context marked by nearly excessive freedom and a fragile sense of community, it is unsurprising that fear and insecurity should arise naturally. Encounters with unfamiliar individuals tend to trigger suspicion about their intentions and integrity.

Aristotle (2017, p. 32) emphasized that, while the civilized human being stands as the noblest among animals, "once separated from law and justice, he becomes the worst of all." Moreover,

regarding the structure of social life, Hobbes (2012, p. 172) observed that "laws have no power to protect without a sword in the hands of a man, or group of men, charged with enforcing them." When oversight fails and impunity appears to prevail, disorder is likely to escalate.

Having considered the human being as the central agent in the exercise of passions and as a source of fear for others, the next section examines in greater depth the causes of social insecurity and the fear experienced in urban life. This analysis draws primarily on the insights of sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2021).

URBAN INSECURITY AND THE STATE'S ABSENCE

One of the primary explanations for contemporary fears lies in the diminished capacity of the State to ensure protection. The erosion of regulatory frameworks and the resulting increase in individualism have weakened traditional bonds. According to Bauman (2021, p. 19–20), "at the moment when kinship ties between individuals, along with the friendships cultivated within communities and professional associations, were weakened or severed," insecurity began to take root. When solidarity gives way to competition, individuals are left to rely on their own resources, which are often scarce and insufficient (BAUMAN, 2021, p. 21).

In modern urban environments, where relationships with neighbors are increasingly superficial or nonexistent, distrust becomes common. As a result, self-surveillance becomes the default approach to safety. "The more distance grows between individuals and their immediate surroundings, the more trust is placed in external systems of environmental monitoring" (GUMPERT and DRUCKER, 1998 apud BAUMAN, 2021, p. 25). It is important to note that access to adequate public services and to quality self-protection measures is not universal. As Castel (2005 apud BAUMAN, 2021, p. 17) explains, "for individuals lacking economic, cultural, or social resources, protection must be collective."

Indeed, "cities have become repositories of problems caused by globalization" (BAUMAN, 2021, p. 32), which makes local solutions difficult, if not impossible. As a result, many residents become victims of circumstances they did not create, experiencing the collective fear and insecurity inherent in urban life. Nonetheless, as previously noted, some actors benefit from these adversities by "selling private protection," whether through gated communities, monitored homes, private security patrols, armored vehicles, or similar services.

Those who advocate for community isolation often fail to realize that such fears, once internalized, may diminish, though not necessarily through resolution. Consciously or not, many

individuals begin to internalize "the interests of the enemy weapons aimed at their own communities. The greater the threat and the deeper the insecurity, the more tightly closed the ranks of defenders become, and the more likely they are to remain so for the foreseeable future" (BAUMAN, 2003, p. 127–128).

In the face of an uncertain future, fragile social positioning, and a lack of existential security, conditions characteristic of what Bauman calls liquid modernity, individuals tend to narrow their goals and shift their focus toward personal safety. This context easily gives rise to segregation and exclusion, eventually culminating in urban conflict (BAUMAN, 2021, p. 41).

Such a scenario is particularly evident in large, heterogeneous urban centers, where residents may find themselves torn between mixophobia (fear of difference) and mixophilia (attraction to diversity). Although strangers may inspire fear and the desire for distance, cities also offer a range of opportunities and cultural experiences that attract many. This explains the steady migration toward large cities, especially among those "tired of rural life and small towns, weary of routine, and desperate due to a lack of prospects" (BAUMAN, 2021, p. 47).

CONCLUSION

This study presented clear and concise reflections on the fears associated with urban life, identifying the origin of such fears in the figure of the human being, fragile when alone, yet often inclined to exploit collective life to gain advantages at the expense of others' suffering.

It was emphasized that globalization, reinforced by the dissemination of partially inaccurate or, at the very least, biased information, contributes to intensifying the fear of living in society. Faced with the need to reside and carry out activities in urban spaces, those with financial means often choose isolation, seeking protection from potential threats, namely, criminal acts committed by others, through high walls, electronic surveillance, private security services, armored vehicles, and other defensive mechanisms. This pattern of behavior leads to increased individualism and detachment from local communities.

Such isolation further weakens the already fragile relationships characteristic of liquid modernity, in which bonds are unstable, flexible, and subject to abrupt change, unlike the solid and cohesive communities of the past, marked by a stronger presence of the State and collective life.

The study also addressed the dichotomy between freedom and security, emphasizing that any expansion of one tends to reduce the other. To illustrate this, the metaphor of a shared container was employed, where the space occupied by one element inevitably restricts the presence of the other.

Ultimately, the human condition is shaped by the desire to possess and the fear of loss. Since

absolute freedom, constant happiness, and perpetual peace, as envisioned by Immanuel Kant (2008), remain utopian ideals, the minimum expectation is a life lived with dignity. In this regard, the study calls for a renewed commitment from the State to adopt a more community-oriented approach, one that strengthens public institutions and prioritizes social sustainability. This involves delivering justice, promoting peace, eradicating poverty, eliminating hunger, reducing inequality, and ensuring access to health and education, among other essential goals.

It is also necessary for the State to impose exemplary punishment on those who cause harm, so that law-abiding individuals may once again feel safe within urban environments. Only then can physical and symbolic barriers be dismantled, allowing neighbors to reconnect and share mutual care and protection.

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