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Fear, Space and Urban Planning

A Critical Perspective from Southern Europe



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*This book is dedicated to the memory
of Alberto, my father, who taught
me the necessity, and possibility,
of change.*

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Abstract

Western citizens live in the safest societies ever, and yet are more concerned with crime and violence than ever. What are the relationships between recent socio-spatial phenomena and the growing relevance of discussions about security/safety? Is urban fear an unavoidable consequence of contemporary urban life? Or does some political use of it exist? Are discourses of fear used as instruments of power in urban policy? And how can planning practice act to counter fear? In order to answer these questions, the book explores urban fear, (misinformative) discourses of fear and their relations with space and the practice of urban planning—focussing on Southern European cities and using empirical data from Palermo and Lisbon. The book has two objectives: to set out a comprehensive, critical, exploratory theory of fear, space and urban planning, unravelling the paradoxes of their mutual relations; and to contribute to recent studies about urban geopolitics, taking them from the space of global cities and enriching them from the perspective of ordinary cities. In short, the book debates whether, and to what extent, the production of ‘fearscapes’, the contemporary landscapes of fear, constitutes an (emergent) urban political economy. To do so, it explores the (re)production of urban fear around: (global) misinformation about, and paradoxes of, security (Chap. 2); the role of otherness, together with its political construction (Chap. 3); the spatialisation of fear in urban space (Chap. 4); and the way urban planning, as a practice and a discipline, is informed by, and has been shaping in turn, urban fear (Chap. 5). In conclusion (Chap. 6) the book adopts a forward thinking approach, envisaging how two radically different (if not opposite) futures are embedded in the present: a dystopian city in which the political economies of fear have become dominant; and some seeds for a practice of urban planning/action capable of facing the political economies of fear.

Chapter 1

Living in a Fearscape?

Abstract This book has two objectives: to set out a comprehensive, critical and exploratory theory of fear, space and urban planning, while unravelling the contradictions and paradoxes of their mutual relations; and to enrich recent studies about urban geopolitics and the geopolitics of fear, taking the research done from the point of view of global cities and looking at it from the perspective of ordinary cities. We shall thus use the term ‘fearscape’, or landscapes of fear, as a linguistic trick with the aim of taking a critical approach to the spatial transformations directly/indirectly connected with, or produced by, discourses and feelings of fear. In short, the book debates whether, and to what extent, the production of landscapes of fear constitutes an (emergent) urban political economy. This chapter sets out the objectives, conceptual background and empirical context of the book. The introduction outlines the object of study, research questions and structure of the book. This will be followed by the summary of some theories about recent socio-spatial urban transformation, before focusing on the transformation in the institutional practice of urban planning, and more especially on the changing patterns of consensus building. The concept of misinformation is introduced as the main instrument for the inquiry of relations between discourses of fear and planning policymaking. In conclusion, the reasons for the election of Southern Europe as a field of study are presented, together with some notes about methodology and the empirical objects of study (the cities of Lisbon and Palermo).

During the autumn of 2007, urban security¹ became an ‘emergency’ in public discourses in Italy.² Towards the end of October, in the days following a rape and murder committed by a Romanian citizen on the outskirts of Rome, mass media and politicians—mainly from centre-right parties, at the time the opposition in the national parliament—promoted a campaign, which tied together criminality and immigration, and lasted for several months. Italy appeared overwhelmed by ‘fears’: fear of crime, fear of violence, fear of violent ‘others’—especially Eastern Europeans, Romanian citizens and the Roma people. The rhetoric boosted factual consequences. A provision for the expulsion of Communitarian citizens approved by the centre-left government and according to Human Rights Watch (2007) targeted against Romanian citizens may well be the first ethnic-targeted public measure after Fascism. Following the collapse of the centre-left government in early 2008, the outvote of the centre-right coalition brought about robust popular support for the new Ministry of Interior, his ‘emergency’ security policies and provisions for clearing hundreds of camps where thousands of Roma had been living, in many cases for several decades.

Albeit with strong national peculiarities, this story is a global one. As a matter of fact, similar events have been recurrent in Western countries since the 1990s³: fears of, and discourses about, crime, violence, terrorism, together with moral panics of several sorts, have been taking up more and more space on public agendas.⁴ I started working on the PhD research, which forms the foundation of this book, in 2009 when Italy was starting to forget the fear it had felt some months before. My curiosity was aroused: was violence actually increasing when Italy felt so? Having figured out that at the same time Italians felt unsafe violence was decreasing—as it had done during the previous couple of decades (cf. Chap. 2)—I looked beyond Italy. I soon estimated that, although contemporary Western societies are probably the most fearful they have ever been, they are indeed the safest they have ever been (Bauman 2005) and they are becoming more and more secure (cf. van Dijk et al. 2007; ICPC 2012).

The decision to carry out this research therefore had two roots, a civic and political one, and an academic one. The citizen wanted to contribute to the deconstruction of the rhetoric and help overcoming the fear that stemmed from it. The aspiring scholar wanted to understand, on two complementary grounds, whether these facts relate to planning theory and practice, and, if so, what effect they have on

¹English is probably the only language to distinguish between ‘security’ and ‘safety’ and, as far as urban security and safety are concerned, there is some conceptual vagueness in the use of the two terms (Tulumello and Falanga forthcoming in 2016). Throughout the book, I will use the terms according to the definition by the International Centre for the Prevention of Crime (ICPC 2012, 3), according to which urban security is a ‘public good delivered by the state under regular circumstances’ and urban safety a ‘subjective feeling of being secure as experienced by citizens’. Put in other words, security will refer to a policy/practical dimension (i.e. *reducing* actual danger), safety to perceptions (i.e. *feeling* safe).

²See Sect. 2.2 for a detailed account.

³The term ‘Western’ will be used to refer to Northern America, Europe and Oceania, which have experienced similar trends in crime trends and security policymaking.

⁴And immigration is often tied with security concerns well beyond Italy (Feldman 2013; Hasselberg 2014).

these practices. First, I wanted to question whether, and to what extent, contemporary feelings of urban fear, and the capacity of public discourses to enhance these feelings, are shortcomings of mainstream conventions and policies of urban planning implemented during the last few decades. To come back to the Italian example, the discourses which followed the rape and murder in October 2007 also addressed issues of decay and the decline of ‘peripheries’ in Rome and, more generally, Italy⁵: poor urban management (lighting, refurbishment, quality of urban space), absence of public services and, more generally, the spatialities typical of low-cost post-second world war residential districts. Is there a role of urban planning policy (land-use, design, management...) and of urban spatialities in the generation of spaces of fear (and conflict) in the urban outskirts of Italy and beyond?

Second and complementarily, I wanted to explore whether, and to what extent, discourses of and about fear are capable of shaping and twisting planning practice, nowadays—e.g. has the institutional practice of urban planning in Italy been influenced by the campaign of 2007 and 2008?

The hypothesis was that some of the sociopolitical processes and spatial practices characterising the last few decades, in the Western world and beyond, have been, and are, using fear and urban fear instrumentally for agendas that are placing the civic and public gist of urban spaces worldwide into a state of crisis. As a result, fear, together with the geopolitics of security stemming from it, has been producing exclusion, affecting especially marginalised minority groups (Pain 2010). If this is the case, putting fear at the centre of planners’ agendas is, nowadays, inescapable.

1.1 Object of Study and Objectives of the Book

I shall now define the terms used in the title of the book and, with them, the object of study, the aim and the conceptual approach. The object of study is urban *fear*, that is, the fear of being a victim of violent crime in an urban *space*. The book addresses urban fear from two converging perspectives: the influence of fear on the perception of urban environments, on the one hand, and the way the generation of individual and collective feelings is capable of shaping consensus around public policies and practices, on the other.

Beyond feelings per se, the book explores the ‘discourses of fear’, that is, those texts—either political, journalistic, media or fictional—about themes directly or indirectly linked with the generation of feelings of fear (e.g. reports about violent crimes, statistics about criminal trends, political discourses around urban security,

⁵More recently, the appearance of discourses about immigration and violence, used instrumentally by right wing political parties, has characterised again the Italian public debate. In November 2014, the discourse was generated around the case of a peripheral district of Rome, a council housing district where a centre for under-aged asylum seekers was created a few years ago. In this case, there had been no violent crimes at all, but an allegation of attempted sexual violence by the young asylum seekers, allegations admitted false later on by the ‘victim’ herself.

narratives of urban decay). Within the discourses of fear, special attention is devoted to the ‘rhetoric of fear’, that is, discourses used as instruments to boost individual and collective feelings of urban fear.⁶

Although it draws on a number of disciplinary insights and methodological perspectives, the core of the book is the study of the institutional practice of *urban planning*. The conceptual approach draws on that of *critical urban theories*, it aims at revealing contradictions rather than employing mainstream assumptions, exposing forms of power, inclusion/exclusion and justice/injustice patterns (cf. Brenner 2009; Marcuse 2010): in other words, it seeks to question the ‘prevailing order’ of things (Morton 2007, 111).

Hence, we shall use the term ‘fearscapes’, or landscapes of fear, as a linguistic trick for a critical approach to what I term the processes of ‘spatialisation of urban fear’ (Tulumello 2015b). In other words, it includes the spatial transformations directly or indirectly connected with, or produced by, discourses and feelings of urban fear—e.g. fortification, privatisation of public space, spaces of exclusion and seclusion, control over urban space, all of which will be explored in-depth in Chap. 4. The concept of landscape, like fear, is generated at the ‘intersection of the practical and the reflexive, the natural and the cultural, and the affective and the rational’ (Gold and Revill 2003, 36). Landscape is a conceptual category that stems from the distance between an observer and an observed space (Desportes 2005). Suggesting that it would be often enough to live within alleged ‘spaces of fear’, rather than experiencing them through descriptions and representations, in order to figure out that they are not spaces of fear, the underlying idea is that several contemporary feelings of fear are subproducts of policies and discourses rather than inescapable presences in contemporary urban life—*pace* who suggests the latter (e.g. Bannister and Fyfe 2001; Kitchen 2002; Cozens 2011). The central theme of the book is thus to debate whether, and to what extent, the production of landscapes of fear constitutes an (emergent) urban political economy (cf. Sandercock 2002).

The book will show how existing literature and mainstream theories about the relationships between fear, spatialisation of fear and urban planning have tended to rely on cases occurring in global cities or in cities experiencing situations of conflict. This book, on the contrary, applies theories about urban fear to ‘ordinary’ urban contexts (cf. Amin and Graham 1997; Robinson 2011). This is why, although the general space of inquiry is that of contemporary (especially Western) cities, the theoretical and empirical focus is on urban territories of *Southern Europe*, whose specificities will allow for the building of more nuanced critical theories, with a balance between global discourses and local relations of power in the daily practice of urban planning. Examples from the cities of Lisbon and Palermo, where case study analysis has been carried out during the PhD research and beyond, are used throughout the book.

To summarise, the book has two objectives. The first, acknowledging that ‘the issue of fear is still highly marginal to the main stages of theoretical development in

⁶Rhetorical speech ‘aims not to reach understanding with others, but only to manipulate their thought and feeling in directions that serve the speaker’s own ends’ (Young 2000, 63).



Fig. 1.1 The field of exploration of the book

planning theory' (Abu-Orf 2013, 159), is to set out a comprehensive, critical and exploratory theory of fear, space and urban planning, unravelling the contradictions and paradoxes of their mutual relationships.⁷ The second objective is enriching recent studies about urban geopolitics (see, among others, Graham 2010; Rossi and Vanolo 2010) and the geopolitics of fear (see Pain 2010), taking the research done from the point of view of global cities and looking at it from the perspective of ordinary cities.

The field of exploration (i.e. the background of research questions) of the book is summarised in the connections among the vertices of the triangle represented in Fig. 1.1—i.e. (1) contemporary urban spatialities, (2) feelings of urban fear and (3) discourses of fear—and the relations of these with (4) the practice(s) and policy/ies of urban planning.

1.2 Structure of the Book

The reminder of this chapter sets out the contextual and conceptual background, as well as the research questions, together with the reasons for the election of Southern Europe as the focus of analysis. Some readings of recent socio-spatial urban transformation are summarised, before focusing on the transformations of the institutional practice of urban planning, and especially on the changing patterns of justification for, and consensus building in, urban policies. The concept of misinformation is introduced as a main instrument for the inquiry of relationships between discourses of fear and planning policymaking. The conclusion of the chapter summarises some of the

⁷See Abu-Orf (2013) and Tulumello (2015a) for some first steps in this direction.

common characterisations of Southern European urban territories and includes some notes about methodology and the empirical objects of study.

The following four chapters set out the arguments of the book, progressively approaching a debate about the institutional practice of urban planning. In each chapter, theoretical concepts are presented and then reconsidered from a Southern European perspective, making use of examples. These chapters (especially Chaps. 2, 3, and 4) are structured so that they can be read independently—they have an introduction that sets out the main problems and goals, a core text and short conclusions. Longer examples, which are more narrative and make larger use of quotations and empirical material, are set in ‘boxout’ sections, so that the hurried reader interested in grasping main concepts could skip them. However, the book is structured with the aim of building a conceptual framework detailed in Chap. 5, and all parts converge to this goal.

Chapter 2 debates the relationships between crime, perceptions of insecurity, and political and media reports about crime and security. The chapter starts with the acknowledgement that feelings of fear have become predominant in the Western public debate in the last couple of decades, at the same time as Western cities have become less and less violent. It is therefore debated how discourses about crime, violence and terrorism have been capable of influencing public feelings and how they create support for specific sets of policies. The chapter also describes two media and political campaigns about crime and immigration, which were carried out in Italy and Portugal between 2007 and 2008, together with their effects on public feelings of, and national policies for, urban security.

Chapter 3 engages with the role of diversity and otherness in the generation of feelings of fear and patterns of exclusion in urban space. A debate about encounters in public space and the psychological implications thereof opens the chapter. Then, it argues that the social construction of groups is not a neutral practice and implications of the processes of marginalisation and exclusion are debated. The case of Italian Roma is then presented as an example of an especially ‘extreme’ version of urban exclusion processes.

Chapter 4 provides a taxonomy for the debate of the fearscape, the urban spatialities generated by, or in relation to, fear and discourses of fear. It encompasses: Enclosure, the spaces of exclusion and seclusion, either hetero- or auto-produced; Barrier, the role of networked infrastructures in the fragmentation of urban space; Post-Public Space, processes of privatisation, thematisation, fortification, and even militarisation, of public space; and Control, the politics of surveillance over urban and public space. Examples from Palermo and Lisbon are presented for each spatial form as a way of furnishing evidence for advocating, as is done in conclusion of the chapter, for more nuanced theory making.

Chapter 5 focuses on the institutional practice of urban planning with the aim of setting out a critical exploratory framework to unravel the relationship between planning practice and fear. This chapter reviews the existing critiques of mainstream urban planning paradigms while unravelling their implications for urban fear. It also looks at the tendency of the modernist paradigm, whose specific spatialities dominate the structure of most Western cities, to create places where the encounter is problematic or fearful and reviews the new forms of urban exclusion

entrenched in planning mainstreams emerging in the last few decades. The histories of two council housing districts in Palermo and Lisbon are used to apply and test the theoretical discussions. The conclusion of the chapter reconsiders the research questions and summarises a threefold exploratory framework around: (geo)politics and spatialisation of fear; (modernist) spatialities and fear of otherness; and the (neoliberal) political economies of fear.

As a conclusion to the book, Chap. 6 suggests some ways forward from two opposite perspectives, a dystopian prefiguration of an urban space wherein fear is dominant and some insights for the planner who aims at overcoming fear.

1.3 Urban Space

The recent history of urbanisation in Western countries is characterised by three major ‘episodes’ (Scott 2011), one following the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, another resulting from the consolidation of the Fordist system of mass production, and the last stemming from the transition towards a post-Fordist economic system. Western urbanisation shows the first radical qualitative and quantitative transformation after the industrial revolution: at the same time as the city became a place of confrontation and conflict between the emerging bourgeois and working classes, walls were torn down and the distinction between city and fields blurred. In the decades that followed, economic development on one hand, and class struggle and conflict on the other produced better working conditions and higher wages, which allowed for the emergence of the middle class: most of the twentieth century was marked by the consolidation of a Fordist economy grounded on the mass consumption of durable goods. The domination of private transport and detached homes, the latter especially in the US, fostered a new phase of urbanisation marked by suburbanisation and sprawling of residential developments. Workers’ districts were progressively replaced by a centripetal system of peripheries, and infrastructural networks became a fundamental asset of cities (Graham and Marvin 2001).

With the decline in and outsourcing of heavy industry, the post-Fordist transition characterised the last three decades of the twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries. The *grande trasformazione* of Western cities followed (Martinotti 1993; see also Scott 2011): traditional urban cores experienced a decrease in population for the first time in centuries, with people taking advantage of moving to nearby quasi-metropolitan areas. Terms such as ‘exopolis’ (Soja 1992), ‘edge city’ (Garreau 1988) and ‘post-metropolis’ (Soja 2000) are attempts at describing the multiplicity of emerging spatialities. The traditional urban hierarchy, with the dominance of centre/periphery relations is, at different times, sent into crisis by centrifugal forces and reaffirmed by centripetal ones, that is, by counter urbanisation and reurbanisation trends (Champion 2001). At the same time, great global cities have been emerging as places of accumulation of capital, power and human resources (Sassen 1998).

The new urban fabric is defined by the economic logic of accumulation, inasmuch as the unitary logic at the basis of historic cities was replaced by the