

Public opinion on security: psycho-social analysis dimensions around fear of crime and its media treatment

*Opinión pública de la inseguridad:
dimensiones de análisis psico-social en torno
al miedo al delito y su tratamiento mediático*
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We present a state-of-the-art about the relationship between the feeling of insecurity, moral panic, wave of violence, and fear of crime, attending to psycho-social dispositions and Mass Media influence, along with the potential benefits of citizen participation spaces, approaching Neighborhood Councils in Córdoba, Argentina. We notice that Mass Media provoke the increase in fear of crime as well firm up favorable positions into punitivism. On the other hand, we observe conditions for a critical view of media strategies that are not given in Neighborhood Councils.

KEYWORDS: Fear, insecurity feeling, violence, public policies, mass media.

Se construye un estado del arte de la relación entre sentimiento de inseguridad, pánico moral, ola de violencia y miedo al delito, atendiendo a disposiciones psicosociales e influencia de los Medios de Comunicación Masiva, junto con los potenciales beneficios de espacios de participación ciudadana, abordando el caso de los Consejos Barriales en Córdoba, Argentina. Se advierte que los medios de comunicación influyen en el incremento del miedo al delito y tienden a reforzar posturas favorables al punitivismo. Por su parte, en los Consejos Barriales se observa que no estarían dadas las condiciones para una crítica a las estrategias mediáticas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Miedo, sentimiento de inseguridad, violencia, políticas públicas, medios de comunicación masiva.

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INTRODUCTION

From a psycho-social perspective, the proposal is to cover a series of phenomena identified by Amadeo and Aruguete (2013) related to the connection between Mass Media and the fear of crime. It is related to emergency phenomena, not excluding in the social field, such as moral panic, feeling of lack of safety and wave of violence. From this referential frame, this paper is intended, firstly, to understand how these concepts associated with Mass Media public action acquire importance for people's everyday reality. Following this line of thought, the intention is to analyze the potential benefits from the different spaces where citizen participation is allowed, as building alternatives for opinion and action around security. For this, a specific section proposes as a case the Neighborhood Councils, in force since 2015 in the Province of Cordoba, Argentina.³ To continue, the methodology for the research on bibliography and secondary sources is detailed.

METHODOLOGY

First, a bibliographic revision was conducted taking into account articles from scientific open access journals available on meta-searchers such as SciELO, Redalyc and DOAJ. Available antecedents were surveyed on websites belonging to scientific-academic institutions such as the Science and Technology Electronic Library from the Argentine Republic (*Biblioteca Electrónica de Ciencia y Tecnología de la República Argentina*), from 2005 to 2019. The importance of collecting information related empirically to different populations was valued.

³ It is important to mention that this experience study is framed in a doctoral thesis in a course named "Fear of Crime, Political Conversation and Political Ideology in Participant and Non-participant Citizens in Neighborhood Councils in Cordoba, Argentina (2015 -2020)" ("Miedo al delito, conversación política e ideología política en ciudadanos participantes y no participantes de Consejos Barriales en Córdoba, Argentina [2015-2020]"), during the field work exploratory phase. PHD in Social Studies in Latin America, National University of Cordoba.

However, data taken from Latin America was prioritized, specifically from Argentina. Besides, during that search, it was determined that phenomena such as moral panic, feeling of lack of safety and wave of violence were connected with urban crime (crime against property and personal integrity occurred in public places). Within this analytical cut, a large number of contemporary works were dismissed when these terms appeared linked to pedophilia, sexual abuse, gender violence in couples, etc., as the focus of current debates that today deserve separate chapters in the scientific agenda and that certainly exceed the objectives of this research.

Secondly, the case of the public policy of Neighborhood Councils (CB, for its Initials in Spanish) instituted in Cordoba since 2015 was analyzed, regarding the role it could play in the increase of alternative sources of information to the Mass Media and the creation of inclusive preventive measures. This case is approached with the methodological objective of considering the materialization of preventive policies towards insecurity in the citizens' daily life. Without the intention of making an exhaustive approach, studies of local references and research on the province regulations are consulted, under the perspective of single case or intrinsic case studies. It is a methodology with interest in a broader conceptual or empirical problem that the case illuminates. This is intentionally chosen according to the thematic interest, acting as "a system delimited in time and space of actors, relations and social institutions where it is sought to account for its particularity within the framework of its complexity" (Neiman & Quaranta, 2006, p. 220).

The information collected is then organized into two interrelated sections: the first details phenomena linked to insecurity from a perspective that integrates its social and intra-subjective dimensions. In the second, the case of the CB is developed, inserted in the scope of local public policies that have measures of community crime prevention as an axis. Finally, the limited impact of this modality of State action is discussed, in the context of the citizen experience mediated around this problem.

FEAR OF CRIME: APORIAS AROUND THE FEELING OF INSECURITY

Following Focás (2013), crime and violence have become a central concern in Latin American public opinion since the last decade, even overcoming the discontent or concern about other compelling social problems such as unemployment and inflation. In Argentina, insecurity is located in the second place of public opinion most concerning aspects, after the economy (in the framework of the economic crisis that the country is going through).⁴ However, this high level of public concern about insecurity often does not correspond to official data on actual crimes that have occurred in that territory. To understand this aspect, it is necessary to clarify the distinction between two types of insecurity: objective insecurity, which implies the probability of being a victim of a crime and depends on variables such as age, gender, housing, work, personal routines or belonging to a class or social sector. And, on the other hand, the subjective insecurity, which is related to the fear of being a victim of a crime and is a product of the social construction of fear with the association of diverse factors and especially the social alarm and panic produced by the news gathered by the Mass Media (Pegoraro, 2002).

To examine the conditions that lead to the gap between objective and subjective insecurity, we will refer to the notion of “fear of crime”, based on the definition proposed by Vozmediano (2010) as “an emotional experience of fear or anxiety in citizens daily lives, due to the possibility of personally experiencing the fact of being a victim of a series of common crimes in their social and geographical context” (p. 212).

Considering these features of self-representation and intersubjective speculation on the fear of crime, it is worth asking about the possible influence exerted by the Mass Media. In Argentina, since the 21st century, a series of influential media representations on crime have been observed, and insecurity has begun to be addressed, contributing to a growing social sensibility (Focás, 2013). Through this historical and particular focus on criminal stories, it builds a *we* that claims against

⁴ See: Redacción GLP (2019).

crime. A dangerous, invisible *other* is generated, which allows the transformation of the citizen into a victim-citizen, who faces danger and is damaged by “crime” (Calzado & Van Den Dooren, 2009).

This category is linked to the notion of *risk society* proposed by Beck, Giddens & Lash (2001, in Rodríguez Garcés et al., 2017). One of the key concepts to understand this theory is that of *definition relationships*, corresponding to those rules, institutions and resources that determine the identification and definition of risks. From this perspective, it is not enough to define the risks, it is necessary to stage them in the Mass Media in order to turn them into public interest issues with the capacity to provoke political mobilization.

Given this outlook, we believe it is relevant to analyze what mechanisms Mass Media use and what role they play in the configuration of insecurity in the public opinion agenda, as well as in the social definition of what insecurity is and the frameworks around who, what actors, groups and social sectors are involved in it.

Mass Media and Public Opinion on Insecurity

Mass Media have at their disposal various mechanisms that allow them to impact on public opinion on insecurity. Following D’adamo and García Beaudoux (2007), this is achieved mainly by controlling the place that news referring to insecurity and crime cover in their agendas. In this regard, the theory of agenda-setting becomes valid. It refers to a process of selecting the problems on which the news is focused, dismissing other alternatives and producing as a result that public opinion focuses its considerations on those that were chosen as the most relevant. In this sense, Mass Media have the possibility to facilitate the release of certain topics over others and to point out to audiences what aspects to think about, around such axes. In this regard, Dastres Abarca (2002) highlights the large number of studies that confirm a strong relationship between public opinion and media coverage in the context of the influence of the agenda-setting, in contrast to the low relationship between these two variables and the material social reality. This demonstrates the capacity of the Mass Media to transform the contents of public opinion beyond the actual occurrence of the events.

Likewise, the Mass Media provide explanations about the reasons and consequences of the situations transmitted, which places us in a second level of agenda setting, which McCombs (2004) relates to the concept of framing, which consists of strategically framing discursive content, reinforcing certain aspects of a topic and correlating them with certain causes. Following Amadeo (2008), this is an approach that differs from the classic theory of agenda-setting, since while the latter focuses on studying the degree of influence of media messages on public opinion, framing analyzes the process by which this influence materializes, taking into account the way in which the subjects' previous cognitions interact with the news. In this sense, it focuses on the connection between messages and their interpretation, studying the transmission of meanings, signs, symbols and moral values from society to the media, and vice versa. In short, framing implies the selection of certain aspects of social reality, promoting a definition of the chosen problem, a causal interpretation of it, a moral evaluation, and a recommendation of how to deal with or solve the issue (Entman, 1993).

The key role played by the Mass Media is appreciated when it comes to knowing and delimiting the daily social reality around insecurity, also warning that from this place the Mass Media affect the configuration of three psychosocial phenomena (Amadeo & Aruguete, 2013) that can explain the fear of crime. They are Kessler's *feeling of lack of safety* (2009), Cohen's *moral panic* (2009, in Amadeo & Aruguete, 2013) and Fernández Pedemonte's *wave of violence* (2005).

Feeling of lack of safety

This notion described by Kessler (2005, 2009, 2011) arises from his studies on the *fear of crime*, a variable mostly used when talking about subjective insecurity. As a result of this research, it gives an account of a broader concept, introducing the notion of a *feeling of lack of safety*. Conceptualizing the fear of crime as an emotional response of fear or anxiety in facing crime or symbols associated with it, Kessler (2011) highlights that the feeling of lack of safety allows the inclusion of other emotions interconnected, such as anger, indignation or helplessness, and also includes political concerns, stories about its causes and

actions that constitute the management of insecurity. In other words, it is a multidimensional phenomenon not limited restrictively to violent crimes, which may include acts that do not even constitute a violation of the law. Such is the case of the fear caused, for example, by the presence of groups of young people on the street who are not violating any rules. The characteristic feature of the feeling of lack of safety is the randomness of the danger, based on the perception of the increase of facts and the plurality of figures of the fearsome. Thus, Kessler (in Amadeo & Aruguete, 2013) defines the feeling of lack of safety as the feeling of a random threat that can strike anyone anywhere. The central idea is that we can all be victims of a crime, without being able to foresee or avoid it, thus generating discomfort and a strong sense of helplessness. What is striking about this state is its relative autonomy from actual crime: for example, in 2017 the Citizen Security Observatory reported that, in Argentina, 45% of those surveyed believed that crime had increased near the place where they lived; 69% believed that it had increased in their city; 77% in their province; and 82% in the country. However, crime statistics showed that crime rates had declined in this country, which was not reflected in citizens' perceptions.⁵

In this regard, Kessler (2005) also points to Mass Media as facilitators of this imaginary increase, since they act as the main source of indirect victimization. Following Box et al. (1988), people who have been victims of crime tend to perceive less fear than indirect victims, since the former can count on tools to neutralize these experiences and diminish the sensation of vulnerability, which is absent in people who receive news of these events, whether through comments from a loved one or through Mass Media.

As a result of these media stories, Kessler (2011) argues that two phenomena will occur: the delocalization of danger and the disidentification of fearsome figures. In relation to *delocalization*, there would be a blurring of the areas that can be defined as safe and unsafe, with the result that there is no longer a place where one is completely "safe, without risk". When people feel that the threat can penetrate into any territory, their sense of insecurity is fed back. While the relative

⁵ See: Observatorio de Seguridad Ciudadana (s.f.).

disidentification of figures of fear implies that the perception of threat is not limited only to stereotyped or more stigmatized images, but includes “well-dressed” people who “look middle class” and other previously non-dangerous social subjects. However, there is no abolition of certain stereotypes and prejudices about previously stigmatized people and places; on the contrary, the sense of a random and omnipresent threat is reinforced.

Under these conditions, citizens perform a “decoding” of possible threats in each interaction and space in which they circulate, based on certain gestures, traits and attitudes, in a wide range of possibilities. This decoding also serves to generate devices and strategies that help maintain distance from such dangers, which tends to lead to a general distrust of others, affecting all areas of everyday life and social life of people.

At the micro-social level, it entails forms of preventive avoidance of the other that, beyond the manifest intention of those who believe themselves to be protected, produces evident discrimination of those who are avoided in urban intersections (Kessler, 2011). Likewise, the feeling of lack of safety frightens the quality of life and favors citizen support for strongly punitive policies. It has been observed, for example, in the United States that fear diminishes the legitimacy of criminal justice and leads to self-justice and the carrying of firearms (Hale, 1996).

Moral Panic

Moral panic involves the definition of an event, person or group of people as a threat to social values and interests, presented by Mass Media in a stereotypical way (Cohen, 2009, in Amadeo & Aruguete, 2013). It operates by creating an appropriate enemy (with little power, little presence in the media, easily denounced and lacking legitimacy), choosing an appropriate victim (someone with whom the audience can identify) and seeking to generate consensus that this is not an isolated problem, but one that concerns all of society. Unlike the feeling of lack of safety, which is an individual sensation, moral panic concerns a whole collective (Aruguete & Amadeo, 2012).

Walsh (2017), from his perspective, maintains that moral panic refers to specific instances that awaken a state of alert, where certain events

or behaviors are perceived as a risk to society values and rules. Here it is introduced the concept of folk devils who would be responsible for corrupting society and who are identified by certain groups of power in an uneventful way. Regarding the characteristics of the conformation of moral panic, five essential attributes of the themes that are framed in this phenomenon are contemplated:

Issues that generate *concern* and anxiety in the audience.

That promote *hostility*, repulsion and intolerance to the “folk devils”.

That have *consensus*, that anxiety is widespread in society.

That are *disproportionate*, awakening an exaggerated reaction.

That are *volatile*, as panic emerges and dissipates with amazing speed (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, in Walsh, 2017).

This last feature is supported by Cohen (2011) around the market issues and political interests reproduced by Mass Media. In this way, the issues that generate moral panic are not really related to moral considerations, since if they were; they would remain on the media agenda for a longer period of time. The author also explains that, since the 2000s, a new response has been promoted in society: an active interventionist role. Previously it was intended that people would not react to events considered to be of public concern, but now intervention has become an indicator of success for power groups. The aim is to make the dangers public and to denounce and reproach immorality.

In order to visualize how moral panic operates, Aruguete and Amadeo (2012) analyzed under this perspective the “Píparo Case” of 2010: a pregnant woman was attacked, along with her mother, as they left a bank in the city of La Plata (Buenos Aires, Argentina) by a gang of muggers who followed them to their home. Píparo handed over the money, but was shot, which eventually led to the death of the baby (eight months gestation). The case shocked public opinion and people followed this issue closely in all media. Here we can see how this time the media sought the reproach and mobilization of the people, which led to the sanction, just two months later, of a Banking Security Law. Contemplating the attributes of moral panic, the media coverage was presented with a theme that generated shock and concern in public

opinion, promoted by an appeal to the emotional aspect in Mass Media. Furthermore, it reinforced hostility towards the perpetrators and towards public agencies (that do not properly protect the population from these atrocities). On the other hand, it produced a consensus that the threat is serious and that society must generate some kind of solution (by proposing certain types of solutions). It appealed to the disproportion or over-dimensioning of the amount or intensity of the case, providing data that seemed to exacerbate the problem. Finally, it pondered a type of fragmented story, instead of framing it within a broader historical framework, leading to the volatility of the case. Thus, the case was limited and its trend ended when the desired objectives were established.

Continuing with the construction of the folk devils, Ayos and Dallorso (2011) affirm that the potential offenders appear strongly linked to the groups made vulnerable by the destructuring of the social protection systems, especially the case of poor young people, who concentrate in themselves all the perceptions of threat. Using the concept of moral panic, we understand that the stigmatization of this population refers to the media search for subjects with little power and legitimacy, with no presence in Mass Media as spokespersons of their reality or as active citizens who claim rights and social figures easily denounceable. In contrast to this group, victims are “good people”, with whom the audience tends to identify, and who embody social values and rules (workers, students, pregnant women, etc.).

Wave of violence

The notion of *wave of violence* is understood by Fernández Pedemonte (2010) within the classification of shocking media cases. These waves account for a “cascade effect” (p. 28) produced by Mass Media, which involves an extension and distortion of a series of isolated crimes. In practice it operates in a double sense, inasmuch as it leads the audience to feel at the mercy of a wave of unlimited crime; but that in turn there is no attempt to understand the social magnitude of each event.

Wave of violence constitute a matrix used to classify and group violent cases that act as a break from routine, both for hearings and for Mass Media, which must generate special procedures to systematically

cover these “extraordinary” cases better than their competencies. The appearance of these cases occurs when a type of crime demands the attention of journalists or editors in a privileged manner. In this sense, when defining a type of crime as valuable, it is taken into account that it is shocking because of the singular cruelty of the crime or because of the peculiarities of its protagonists.

Thanks to the “Thermometer of the Week” (TS, by its Spanish Initials) of the Public Opinion Center of the University of Belgrano, which records the weekly variations of the agenda established by Mass Media, we can observe how this phenomenon operates. Some months the news focused on particular cases, such as a wave of kidnappings, and in others on leading cases, which attract attention because of the peculiarity or treachery of their actions. Leading cases are easily memorable because they appeal to emotions, drama, identification, and generate impressions that serve to judge the dangerousness of society, the inevitability of violence, the impossibility of trust, etc. This focus on certain types of crimes by the Mass Media or the monitoring of particular cases is certainly associated with the phenomenon of the wave of violence.

That said, in order to make an impact, those responsible for providing the information resort to crimes of the same type, or at least similar ones, even when the Mass Media records are significantly different from those provided by the criminal system, and may even take on crimes of the same type but in different contexts and temporalities.

When these specific cases emerge, news coverage of other types of crimes is relegated, and facts of a similar nature are associated that encourage headlines labeled “other case”, or “other victim” of the same crime. This is achieved by decontextualizing the facts, for example, talking about violations in general, without making distinctions if they were carried out by family members or strangers. In this way, the implications of each case and the specific policies that should be generated for its prevention are not taken into account (it is not the same approach that corresponds to problems of intra-family crime, as the work to be developed with people who have raped strangers).

Following Rodríguez (2005), another strategic characteristic of the phenomenon consists in giving more attention to the conflict than to the

solution: the wave is always growing or at least it does not give way, it is never reported to be receding: “has an upward dynamic” (p. 4) until it reaches a situation described as borderline, critical, extreme. In turn, the victims generally only suffer from it passively; the only ones who have an active role in dealing with it are the police and the authorities, who fight it or try to stop it, always without success.

The result of this manipulation would be the formation of preferential mental models for specific situations which, in turn, can be generalized into broader preferential knowledge, attitudes and ideologies (e.g., prejudices about blacks or young people) (van Dijk, 1996). Fernandez (2010) maintains that it conditions the social representations of human groups and the conception of “us and them” in terms of the ideology and interests of the Mass Media that operate as transmitters.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE FEAR OF CRIME: THE CASE OF THE CBS IN CORDOBA

In line with the above notions, it is worth reflecting on what the psychosocial consequences of media strategies are. The first aspect is the increase in the fear of crime, which is explained by the theoretical work of Beck et al. (in Rodríguez Garcés et al., 2017) on the risk society, as well as by Latin American studies on citizen-victims. The feeling of risk of being a victim of a crime is characterized by going through all the dimensions (social, economic, political) of the subjects’ daily life. To this, the delegitimization of the control and protection institutions is added. It would be responsible for reducing the perception of risk in the various spheres of citizens’ social life (Beck et al., in Rodríguez Garcés et al., 2017). Thus, society finds itself in the paradox that the dangers grow and are increasingly manifest, but at the same time they escape from the institutionalized networks that can provide arguments and/or assign responsibilities and identify causes.

Calzado and Van Den Dooren (2009) notion of citizen-victim contributes in this sense, since it explains how the Mass Media impact on the culture of victimization. This positioning makes it possible to transform scattered fears into a set of prejudicial attitudes aimed at identifying the wrongdoers, delimiting problems and establishing

scapegoats, taking into account that, if we talk about victims, the figure of the victimizer appears inevitably. Following this logic, Focás (2013) points out that the Mass Media exploit victimization as a resource of newsworthiness, by focusing the criminal stories by standardizing insecurity and crime, restricting the different aspects of the former by the sole aspect of the crime, where the protagonists (victim and victimizer) are easily identifiable and unlike the concept of insecurity, where there is a greater range of protagonists and the State can in fact be included.

Such conditions provoke the uprising of the citizens, especially the middle class, complaining about the insecurity conditions –restricted to the crime–. These attitudes, in turn, certainly influence the definition of public policies (Rodríguez, 2005), which must be adapted to their voters' issues of interest. Meanwhile, the policies proposed by society often start from drastic and punitive solutions regarding crime and offenders, leaving aside rational debates and the voices of experts who oppose this type of proposal. In this context, since this problem causes are not reliably communicated by the Mass Media, punitive attitudes become commonplace, motivated, for example, by opinion pieces that speak of how insufficiently harsh the penalties are, or highlight the permissiveness of the legislation as an ineffective instrument to stem the criminal activity.

In this regard, Seveso Zanin (2009) highlights that the absolute presence of insecurity in the journalistic agenda increases fear and uncertainty in the audience. These emotions, in turn, generate a state of inaction together with the idea of the impossibility of change, leading systematically to the naturalization that there is nothing that can be done. From the established reality statute, “the shock of meaning triggers demands for the restitution of order” (p. 43), made possible by devices and strategies based on the desire to suppress the people who have caused this reality, seen as the others, the different ones.

In this way, we observe a connection between Mass Media and political interests, through the confusion surrounding the generalized belief that insecurity is generated by the victimizers and that the State can solve the problem only through a “strong hand” or by appealing to public policies aimed at crime prevention, which do not contemplate the

demands of the stigmatized population. That is to say, on the one hand, society as a whole is relieved of its responsibility towards marginalized subjects and, on the other, the State is relieved of its role as guarantor in the protection of rights. In this context, the drastic measures desired by the citizenry are often directed at specific sectors of society that represent otherness. Thus, when one speaks of citizenship, one is in fact referring in this context to a certain sector that is legitimized to be afraid (Hathazy, 2014). At the same time, security policies arise in consideration of this privileged sector, which weighs up the protection of its physical integrity and private property. Accordingly, social policy interventions towards marginalized groups are limited to crime prevention (Ayo & Dallorso, 2011).

These practices provide schemes to delineate social positions in the hierarchical order of urban spaces, where non-owners and those frailly integrated into the legal market systematically derive in the condition of non-citizens (Hathazy, 2014). From this conditioned position, these other threatening entities cannot communicate their needs and positions, which, in the case of being able to express themselves, do not have sufficient legitimacy.

Considering the background presented, it is worth discussing the potential benefits of creating spaces for citizen participation around insecurity, as they would increase the size of interpersonal communication networks and enable spaces to receive information and perspectives from different social actors in addition to Mass Media. Within this framework, different projects have been developed in Argentina over the last decade to promote community-based crime prevention. In Cordoba, since December 2015, a security plan has been implemented consisting of the creation of Neighborhood Councils (CB), as spaces for citizen participation where neighbors, neighborhood council presidents, organizations and neighborhood or proximity police come together, coordinated by a neighborhood promoter who functions as a link between the citizens gathered and the Government. Their objective is the resolution of conflicts related to the security in the neighborhood in which they live; on the other hand, the objectives of the Neighborhood Police consist of the prevention, the recognition of conflictive spaces and the fight against drug dealing, by means of the

work and continuous dialogue with the neighbors (“Se presentó el Plan de Seguridad Provincial”, 2015).

These reforms in the area of public policy in Cordoba are based on the modification of Law No. 9235 on Public Security in Cordoba by the Law on Public and Citizen Security No. 10,437/17, where citizen security becomes a concept that surpasses the security association-maintenance of public order (Garay Reyna & Sorribas, 2018). In this way, security begins to be understood as a right, and if citizenship state is not guaranteed, it is not achieved. This leads to it being seen as an enforceable right to the State, but also as a citizen’s obligation. Citizens must collaborate as protagonists in the spaces created for this purpose, and by assuming the roles of promoting self-control and care practices for themselves (precaution) and for each other (vigilance).

The CBs, as territorial spaces of interaction and social dispute around the concepts of insecurity and effective management for its prevention, are areas of public policy. Following Druckman and Nelson (2003), it is argued that exposure to different points of view enables alternatives to Mass Media, and they are more rational.

Now, it is worth asking if these spaces really show dissimilar opinions and realities, for which it is necessary to know who are the citizens who participate and/or are entitled to participate in these CB. This is based on the understanding that the generation of these participatory spaces is based on neoliberal social discourses of insecurity, seen as the protection of physical integrity and private property, and that they promote the design of policies with a strong territorial anchorage in the local area, taking into account the urban fragmentation and the inequalities within the city. Territory is appealed to. It is structured as a relational concept that imports links of domain, belonging or appropriation between a geographical space and a certain individual or collective subject (Montañez Gómez, 2001). It is, thus, understood that in the social relationships that are produced in the territory there are hegemonic domains of certain individuals or groups. On the other hand, the territoriality of these proposals triggers a hyper-localization of the community, reducing the notions of citizenship and participation to the neighborhood sphere.

Vittorelli (2018) points out that the CBs were introduced with the intention that the recipients were the neighbors in the neighborhoods. Within this population young people, who historically have been a neglected group by the State, would be included, especially those from marginalized neighborhoods. However, this appeal to the participation of the neighbors and young people from popular sectors, ignores the different ways of appropriation of the public space that the subjects carry out in their own territories (Plaza et al., 2019), as well as who is legitimized to define the insecurity and strategies for its prevention. In this way, the representativeness of those who come to the CB is questioned, since young people and youth organizations do not participate in these spaces.⁶ The formation of the CBs then deepens social logics linked to dilution and prejudice against marginalized sectors of society; so that it works on the security of those included in the territories where it is implemented (adults grouped in social organizations with lobbying capacity who participate in the CBs), but continues to leave the interaction with young people from stigmatized sectors to the traditional police, that is, without generating strategies from the community police (Plaza et al., 2019). This results in the perpetuation of the violation of their rights by not being called upon in the process of defining actions in relation to security in their own territories. These young people are neither called nor questioned by the community, and therefore “the reproduction of inequity as a redistribution of security” is reinforced (Frederic, 2017). “Shouldn’t they be the first to be called if the goal is to strengthen the bond?” (Plaza et al., 2018, p. 28).

⁶ Interview with participants in the *Colectivo de Jóvenes por Nuestros Derechos* (Youth Group for Our Rights), from the city of Córdoba in December, 2017 based on the Project “La política pública de seguridad en Córdoba. Análisis de la definición del problema y la respuesta estatal en el periodo 2010-2015” (Public Policies on Security. Analysis of the Problem Definition and State Response during the period between 2010-2015); directed by Valeria Plaza Schaefer, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (National University of Córdoba, Social Sciences Faculty).

As regards the debate content, Plaza et al. (2019) highlight that, within the CBs, the discussions of the neighbors quickly assume a deeply circumstantial and casuistic character of criminal acts suffered, where policies are not debated. Thus, the scope of the topics discussed there as security issues, in general, means that they are primarily linked to the type of state presence in each of these territories, rather than to specific issues related to the conflicts in the neighborhood.

Elorza et al., (2019) agree that the CBs are considered by organizations and neighbors as an opportunity to make community and family demands, and it is based on their responses that their participation is maintained. As these goals were not achieved, there was a decrease in the levels of participation, which was also associated with organizational and communication aspects of the program implementation: during the first moments of the CBs, several organizations of the sector were accompanying, with the attendance to the monthly meetings by the neighborhood centers: the educational institutions, the nurseries, community eatery and neighbors. But then there was little publicity of the activities and meeting instances, since notifications are released through a group of WhatsApp with already established contacts. No strategies are generated to bring the community together in order to integrate other actors and establish links with those who have left. In this way, meetings and activities are maintained with little visualization and invitation to excluded individual and group subjects. This makes it difficult to conceive that the action of the CBs could be contributing significantly to improving social cohesion and integrating the community into a crime prevention strategy.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Returning to notion of moral panic as a phenomenon addressed in relation to the fear of crime, we observe that the stigmatization of young people from popular sectors is reproduced by Mass Media, leading such social sectors to find their conceptions and positions delegitimized, even within their own territories. Likewise, and in relation to the socio-mediatic occurrence of waves of violence, we consider how the repetition of similar cases by different neighbors within local

spaces of public policy and citizen participation such as the CB can operate, along with the continuous broadcasting of news of specific crimes by the Mass Media. In this regard, we consider that the fact that the CBs act as a space for catharsis of each criminal act suffered can operate as a reinforcement of the fear of crime, which, as we have seen, triggers positions favorable to justice by its own hand, as well as the reinforcement of penalties (punitive solutions). In this respect, it is worth reflecting on the necessary creation of strategies and devices that are alert to the position of young people from popular sectors, as legitimate spokespersons for their realities, needs and objectives, including them in political spaces in the territory they inhabit.

Taking into account the description of the CB program in the province of Cordoba as a case of empirical reflection provided within the analysis presented, we can argue that locally the ideal conditions for a reconstruction of the definition of insecurity would not be given, nor for a broad social debate where different positions can confront each other and co-construct alternative prevention strategies to the hegemonic approaches of a punitive nature, reframing the problem of security within the chapter of the guarantee of rights by the State. Although the CBs can be seen as a project that ideally seeks these objectives, the scarce representation of the demands of each territory where the established public security policy is materialized hinders their eventual benefits, weakening their potential as spaces for the development of political participation, which is also key to a complex and comprehensive view of public phenomena in democratic terms.

We also warn that those who participate in CBs are those who are legitimized to be afraid. Here it is worth remembering the notion of victim citizenship victim coined by Calzado and Van Den Dooren (2009), from which the representation of the victimizer (as a binary phenomenon author-victim, leaving out the State as intervening actor and guarantor of security) can be inferred.

From what has been developed, we assume that in these spaces the conditions are not given a priori for a criticism of the media strategies, which, as has been pointed out, lead to the maintenance of fear, in general, and towards certain social groups lacking legitimacy, in particular. However, we understand that the creation of spaces for

debate, effectively inclusive and open to different political positions aimed at addressing neighborhood conflicts in a preventive manner, can help a more critical reception of crime news, limiting the consequences of the feeling of lack of safety, moral panic and wave of violence.

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