Emilio del Río Sanz
Universidad Complutense
@ emiliodelrio@madrid.es   ID 0000-0002-8421-1600

Rocío Sétula
Next Educación de Madrid
@ rocio.setula@nexteducacion.com   ID 0000-0002-9246-2418

Fear and its role in the social order

El miedo y su rol en el orden social

ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate the elementary keys of fear, from the fundamental times of the history of civilization to the meanings it takes on in the first quarter of the 21st century. To this effect, it is essential to know who are the actors that shape this omnipresent concept in society, the stories that make it the protagonist, its scope and manifestations, and place them in the complex framework of the current public sphere.

Within this range of approaches, it will deepen on the key role that fear takes in the political configuration, taking into account the media as the main creators of the climate of public opinion. The role of culture as an inseparable element of the constitutive dimensions of the human being will also be explained.

This research aims to offer a diverse conceptual and bibliographical review to understand the role of fear in the social order. The methodology of preserving the voice of the research authors has been prioritized to faithfully share the precise guidelines that will introduce subsequent approaches.

RESUMEN:

Es objeto de este estudio ofrecer las claves elementales del miedo, desde los tiempos fundamentales de la historia de la civilización hasta las significaciones que cobra en el primer cuarto del siglo XXI. Para ello, es preciso conocer quiénes son los actores que moldean este concepto omnipresente en la sociedad, los relatos que lo hacen protagonista y sus alcances y manifestaciones, y situarlos en el complejo entramado de la esfera pública actual.

Dentro de este abanico de abordajes, se ahondará especialmente en el rol que cumple el miedo en la configuración política, considerando a los medios de comunicación como principales creadores de clima de la opinión pública. También se explicitará el papel de la cultura como elemento inseparable de las dimensiones constitutivas del ser humano.

Esta investigación tiene por objetivo ofrecer una revisión conceptual y bibliográfica diversa para comprender el rol del miedo en el orden social. Se ha priorizado la metodología de preservar la propia voz de los autores investigadores para compartir fielmente los lineamientos precisos que introducirán los demás enfoques que nos sucedan.

1. Introduction

The writing of this study finds us in a propitious time to understand closely the situations that we are going to relate in this article; nothing more and nothing less than a pandemic. Covid-19 became the perfect scenario to implicitly use fear as a mechanism of social control. In this sense, the maxim that indicates that the end justifies the means, and also fears, has been exposed.

In this climate where spectacularity reigns, figures find their propitious setting to shine. They have become the stars of the show. These, followed by statistics and all kinds of quantitative tools, have to occupy screens with an ultimate objective that penetrates deeper than informing: they serve to alarm. This is how the editors of this Magazine maintain: «in the era of Big data, of the quantitative, data is the best weapon for the communication of fear» (Comunicación y Hombre Magazine. Francisco de Vitoria University, 2022).

The language of war is another of the tools that responds to creating a climate of hostility. Every word that is pronounced carries with it an intention. There are no coincidences in the fabric of communication.

On the other hand, we find ourselves with the figure of a common enemy: the virus. It would be difficult to question him in the face of the evidence. It happens that, within this «war», different enemies have been emerging in the form of people, habits, geographical places and even the order of convictions. Little by little, there were few safe «places» left, as uncertainty and distrust took over the scene.

It will be difficult to forget the time when inseparable concepts such as embrace and friendship, caress and care, union and hope became dichotomies. Schools were no longer a priority, hospitals did not inspire healing, and the established was no longer an option.

The fear was imminent. The protagonist guilt. The danger was all that was talked about and the consequences the only certain thing. A real scary scene.

In this film there were no faces, neither friends nor enemies. There just weren't. There were viruses, there were bodies, there were numbers (we have said: many numbers and many more figures), there was news and there were a few heroes. Faceless, with a mask.

The fear of the invisible spread with the force of violence, and with the force of evidence; that violence typical of a catastrophe, of bewilderment and sudden confusion; that evidence that unmasked the lack of pragmatism and vulnerability of our social systems.

It is true that —sooner rather than later— the different key players in the world community realized that this fear of the invisible, so ingrained, empowered them in such a way that they could exercise extraordinary control mechanisms over issues that are hardly questionable in current democratic systems. And, interest through, they did not hesitate to use this «ace» that the deck had shuffled.

The media and political actors, throughout the struggles of history, have exercised their power with fear as an allied tool. It is not a novelty, but an adaptation of circumstances experienced by man since its origins. As different sciences have contributed, fear is understood biologically as a system capable of adapting to function as a survival mechanism, and that responds for defense purposes in situations that require acting quickly and effectively. For its part, historical retrospective itself makes us understand that fear is a causal and consequent element of the social and cultural issues that give life to society.

It is this premise that we will develop throughout different sections, where each of them aims to delve into a key binding aspect of the role of fear in the social order. In this sense, we take the basis that it gives us to explain the concept of fear in its pure state. Then, we continue with the explanation of three edges that nourish the understanding of the object of study. They place fear as a basic emotion, as a founding part of the political order and as a key player in the social construction and cultural experience.

What are we afraid of? This is the question that guides the continuation of the article. In this section, traces emerge that we have internal fears and external fears, the latter typical of culture. Therefore, the next topic to develop is the link between culture and the object of study that summons us.

Continuing in the investigation of essential issues of fear, we find its communication. This occurs in an interconnected and dependent manner with respect to the public sphere and the media, vertices that we will also develop. In the same way, it is necessary to become aware of the particularity of culture —especially mediatized— and of the punctual relationship between fears and the media.

To conclude, we have to reflect on fear and its impact on the way of life in the wide generalized range of coexisting contexts today.

2. The concept of fear

Etymologically, fear comes from the Latin term *metus*. In the Greek spectrum we can find *phobos* – where the concept of phobia comes from. And its synonyms would be panic, from the Latin *panicus* and the Greek *panikós*; terror, from the Latin of the same name; and fear from the Latin *timor*. Benjamin Veschi expresses that «in the presence of fear there are two antagonistic reactions: the brave attitude manages to overcome it and the cowardly behavior does not. This duality is present throughout the entire course of human history» (Veschi, 2019). To understand what we are talking about when we talk about fear, it is necessary to stop at the very definition of the concept. And in this field we find different perspectives.

As observed in «The political dimension of fear: We are cities without walls. Fear and politics in the Tomana synthesis», Socrates asserts that fear is nothing more than the idea of imminent evil[1] And, for his part, Aristotle maintains that fear is defined as the expectation of evil[2] (Giraldo Ramírez, 2002). If we relate fear so directly to evil, we must consider what evil is. The text takes up the idea that «evil is defined by opposition to good and good for the human being consists of conforming to reason»[3] so that –thanks to the characteristic of rationality of the human being– he accesses what good, to good, through reason (Giraldo Ramírez, 2002).

After this generic appreciation, it is necessary to offer details regarding what is considered an evil that can cause fear or fear. This is how Jorge Giraldo Ramírez specifies it in his section:

1/ Plato, Laques, in Diálogos. Porrúa. Mexico,1984, p. 57

2/ Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, III 6. It is quoted by Nicomachean Ethics. Politics. Porrúa. Mexico, 1996, p. 36. 3/ Thomas, op. cit., II-II q. 123 a. 1. (Treatise on social virtues), BAC, T. IX, 1955.

It is not, therefore, any evil as it may seem in the Socratic version, but rather an arduous evil. Aristotle clarifies that not all evils are feared, for example being unfair or slow, but rather those that can cause great pain or ruin[4]; additionally, small evils are not enough to disturb the firmness of the will in the fulfillment of rational mandates. The arduousness, back to the saint, consists of the difficulty that said evil presents to be overcome, a difficulty that has to do in principle with events that have a cause external to us and that, therefore, are beyond the scope of our power and will. An arduous evil can occur, either due to the magnitude of the eventual damage itself, its sudden presentation and the condition (weakness) of the subject that faces it[5] (Giraldo Ramírez, 2002).

Fear and evil –according to Tomás– may not share an object. That is, the object of fear can be «the one from whom evil can come»[6]. What Tomás raises in this instance is that the purpose of evil can be in human beings, as well as in nature, as well as in God. Now, it is necessary that we mention the time in which evil acts: in the text «The political dimension of fear: We are cities without walls. Fear and politics in the Tomana synthesis» ensure that evil «has to be possible or imminent» (Giraldo Ramírez, 2002).

What seems unanimous up to that moment, between Tomás and his predecessors, is the fact that fear is «felt» in a hybrid time, since it is not the present or the distant future. Regarding the latter, Aristotle argues that one does not fear what is very far away[7] because the worries arise from the proximity of the problem (Giraldo Ramírez, 2002). Tomás adds that «there is no fear in the present of evil, since in such a case the passions that are given are pain, the damage caused being external, and sadness, if such were internal».[8]

We can infer that while the threat of evil is part of the present, the evil itself belongs to the (near) future. It is Aristotle who defines that danger is configured «in the approximation of what causes fear».[9] In this sense, "evil does not have to be real but can also be apparent or represented» (Giraldo Ramírez, 2002).

This premise is intended to express the idea that fear is not produced only by encountering a nearby evil or by its force, but that it can also be generated by those signs that indicate that evil may happen. This characteristic includes the possibility that, finally, this evil will not come true.

Francisco de Vitoria, one of the greatest disciples of Tomás, sheds light three hundred years later by dissociating concepts such as reality and representation: «those who fear nothing are safe and those who are not in danger are safe. It is perfectly possible that one is safe because he is not afraid and that he is not safe, because he is in danger»[10] (Giraldo Ramírez, 2002).

In «The political dimension of fear: We are cities without walls. Fear and politics in the Tomana synthesis», Jorge Giraldo Ramírez perfectly summarizes that «the cause of fear is evil and also the idea of evil» (Giraldo Ramírez, 2002).

4/ Aristotle, Rhetoric, II 5. Quoted by Eudeba, Buenos Aires, 1966, p. 217.
5/ Thomas, op. cit., I-II q. 42 a. 3, a. 5, MP.
6/ Thomas, op. cit., II-II q. 19 a. 1, BAC.
7/ Aristotle, Rhetoric, II 5, p. 217.
8/ Thomas, op. cit., I-II q. 35 a. 1, MP.
9/ Aristotle, Rhetoric, II 5, p. 218.
10/ Francisco de Vitoria, quoted by Pedro Lumbreras in Thomas, op. cit., BAC, p. 888.

Referring to fear leads us, inevitably, to become aware that it is one of the few basic and fundamental emotions of the human being. Here is the first indication with which we support its elemental character.

3. Fear: a basic emotion

If we talk about emotions, we find various ways of classifying them: we find differentiations of the order of reason or adaptation, primary or secondary, and positive or negative. Each perspective provides us with valuable information, which we will mention below.

In «Collective fear: the passage from individual experience to collective experience» (Barrera Méndez, 2010), it is stated that Charles Darwin, attending to studies of man from a scientific perspective, maintains that emotions «were not rational or irrational, they simply fulfill an adaptive function».[11] Anatomically, fear is defined as «an emotional product of the amygdala, located at the base of the brain and in the center of it» (Barrera Méndez, 2010). Juan Antonio Barrera Méndez defines the fear procedure as follows:

> When (fear) is activated by a threatening stimulus, it produces a hormone called vasopressin, which triggers, in addition to fear, also anxiety, and prepares the person for the fight, flight and evasion of pain, and all the functions of conservation of the individual and of the species (Barrera Méndez, 2010).

In addition, he maintains that fear generates visible changes of a physiological type, of expression, of posture and of a sentimental type (Barrera Méndez, 2010).

On the other hand, we distinguish emotions according to whether they are primary or secondary, understanding that the latter are derived from the former in a more complex process. Robert Plutchik[12] classifies joy, acceptance (receptivity), fear, surprise, sadness, disgust, anger, and anticipation as primary emotions. As secondary emotions, he places optimism, love, submission, awe, disappointment, remorse, contempt, and aggression (Barrera Méndez, 2010).

Regarding assessment, Carroll Ellis Izard[13] identifies those positive emotions as «joy, love and happiness» and attributes to them the role of «improving the feeling of well-being and fostering constructive relationships with others». On the other hand, he mentions fear, anger and sadness as negative emotions since «they tend to diminish the sensation of well-being and create disturbances in relationships with others» (Barrera Méndez, 2010).

The object of this article has been studied from different disciplines throughout the history of humanity. Each of them enriches the understanding of the phenomenon, since they provide specific information that we can relate to arrive at a more elaborate theory.

We can say that fear is understood biologically as a system capable of adapting to function as a survival mechanism, and that it responds for defense purposes in situations that require acting quickly and effectively.

11/ Darwin, Ch.(1998) La expresión de las emociones en los animales y en el hombre. Editorial Alianza Editorial, Spain.

12/ Plutchik, R. (1980). A language of emotions, in Psychology today, pp. 68-78.

13/ Izard, C.E. (1971). The face of emotion. New York: Applenton-Century-Crofts.

From neuroscience books, they consider that fear is "where the structures, processes and products of the human body and particularly of the brain" (Barrera Méndez, 2010).

However, if we shift our gaze to the social sciences, we will find that psychology also attributes responsibility for the adaptive function to the environment and warns that «when there is no way out, this emotion becomes a psychological disorder or a somatoform state» (Barrera Mendez, 2010).

This sociological approach allows us to decipher that fear is also a social and cultural issue. Ovejero[14] indicates that «in situations of risk, tension or change, due to both environmental and social factors, a series of collective behaviors and emotions are triggered» (Barrera Méndez, 2010). It happens that personal and collective experiences somehow «teach» what we should fear. In such a way that we perceive with massive consciousness that certain objects, certain situations or contexts are sources of fear (Barrera Méndez, 2010). Rossana Reguillo calls this process «culturalization», and adds that man follows this path «sometimes in total harmony with the common social discourse,[15] sometimes in negotiation and sometimes in frank conflict, depending on the position occupied by the culture of reference in the general framework of society» (Reguillo, 2000).

In this analysis we propose to study the approaches to fear from communication instances, and with special attention to its social and political influence. With this purpose, we give rise to the second question that indicates the elementality of fear in society.

4. Fear as the founder of the political order

As we have anticipated, fear has been a cornerstone of many transcendental eras throughout all recorded times. That is why different thinkers have noticed the power of influence that it has had in the political-structural construction of societies.

In the section «The incidences of fear in politics», María Teresa Uribe de H. collects Hobbes's guidelines in this regard. This is how he holds it:

> For Hobbes, fear would be in the grammar of war and in the filigree of peace; it would be the architect of Leviathan and the sovereignty of the State, it would keep the political corpus of the Nation united and with minimum rules of obedience, and it would be the guarantee for the maintenance of the new order, the political order of Western modernity, left to the task promethean, –impossible and interminable– of conjuring contingency, cushioning guard uncertainty and reduce the complexity of social life[16] (Uribe de H., 2002).

From a power-oriented approach, Aung San Suu Kyi –Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1991– wrote, referring to Burma, her country: «power does not corrupt but fear: the fear of losing

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14/ Ovejero, A. (1977) El individuo en la masa: psicología del comportamiento colectivo. University of Oviedo, Ediciones Novel.

15/ Robert Fossaert, La société. Une Theréoríe genérale, Volume I, Paris, Editions du Seul. 1977.

16/ Salazar, L. C. (1995). The political-intellectual roots of totalitarianism. In Nora Rabotnikof et al. (es.), La tenacidad de la política. Mexico: Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, pp. 29-38.

power for those who have it, the fear of those that power oppresses and punishes» (Uribe de H., 2002).

From the text we can also extract ideas that point to fear as a rational justifier of the order understood for purposes of submission or compliance. In this sense, it is presented as opposed to disorder and anarchy, since without fear it would be unfeasible to maintain life in society. On the other hand, it reveals a fundamental concept that maintains that fear persists «latent, meandering, omnipresent» despite being «safe» under the figure of sovereign States (Uribe de H., 2002).

These bases that Hobbes raises and that María Teresa Uribe de H. takes up in «Fear: reflections on its social and cultural dimension» are essential to situate fear not as a synonym of insecurity in threatening terms –which, probably, also– but as parallelism of social structure with certain rules and behaviors (Uribe de H., 2002).

If we intend to delve into the interference of fear in politics, we must highlight what authors from very different eras maintain about the common theme. Jorge Giraldo Ramírez, in «The political dimension of fear: We are cities without walls. Fear and politics in the Tomana synthesis», maintains that fear is «an enormous motivating force for political acts» (Giraldo Ramírez, 2002).

Rossana Reguillo also reinforces this dangerous implication by relating fear as the engine and platform of today's social movements. And, as explained in the text «The labyrinths of fear. A journey to the end of the century», Ulrich Beck argues that we are going through «a time in which solidarity arises out of fear and becomes a political force» (Reguillo, 2000).

For his part, it is Thucydides –five centuries before Christ– who assures that the Athenians have acted guided «above all by fear; but later out of desire for glory and, after all, out of interest».[17]

Aristotle also, in Book V of Politics, states that «among the eight general causes of revolutions is fear» and, furthermore, that «fear makes rulers have more control of the government in their hands»[18] (Giraldo Ramírez, 2002).

And, to offer a more detailed and recent definition, we cite again Jorge Giraldo Ramírez in «The political dimension of fear: We are cities without walls. Fear and politics in the Tomana synthesis» where he maintains:

> Force and fear are political functions in the hands of the State, effective in controlling citizens' external manifestations and also in an educational function that will make us better and freer. The external and coercive fear that the State instills can be transformed into a filial, internal and persuasive fear for each citizen (Giraldo Ramírez, 2002).

If we talk about social life structured with common values, we need to address the shared issues that provide cohesion and identity to the body: culture among them. Thus we arrive at the third question that indicates the elementality of fear in human life.

17/ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Madrid, Akal, 1989, I 75, p. 89. Or if you want in a more general formula: «yielding to the main reasons: glory, fear and convenience» (I 76, p. 90).
18/ Aristotle, *Politics*, V 2, p. 244; V 7, p. 253.

5. Fear: social construction and cultural experience

As stated in Reguillo's article, «fear is always an individually experienced, socially constructed, and culturally shared experience.» In this document entitled «The labyrinths of fear. A journey to the end of the century», the concept is deepened, assuring that it is belonging to a cultural matrix that shapes fear –in the first place– and the one that, in addition, gives the citizen the sensation that they are acting according to their reference group, that is, to which it belongs and with whom it shares its idiosyncrasy (Reguillo, 2000).

As the author suggests, fear and hope have been the great engines of the advances of society as such. The role that has united them has been that of balance and compensation, and the tool that has enabled social processes has been determination (Reguillo, 2000). For every fear, there was hope. And then courage, dedication and, of course, action. Rossana Reguillo in her dossier explains it as follows:

> To the fragility of the spirit and the mind, modern science responds with specialized disciplines; the churches, with doctrines, commandments, advice and penances. The market, with material products and cultural offerings tailored to the consumer afflicted by diffuse malaises (Reguillo, 2000)).

These examples function as «modus operandi» that make us understand that man has always gone after his needs and, as his intellect grew, he has found ways to overcome these fears through life in society: institutions. These, in a certain way, are the result of man's efforts to live in society. Well, living with certain common norms and values has been the best way that the species has known in order to face and keep away what is imminently or presumably harming it.

In short, the response to fears has led to the creation of identity and the reinforcement of a shared culture in which socialization has played a key role. Society found in the collective responses the overcoming of its deepest fears. Meanwhile, we can understand what Rossana Reguillo maintains in her article: «fear is not only a way of speaking about the world, it is also a way of acting.» Fear sets us in motion, calls for communication, leads us from fear to action (Reguillo, 2000).

Fear, this abstract but elemental concept, has not always been recognized as such. On the contrary, societies have hidden their fears, perhaps they did so as a defense mechanism in the face of uncertainty or the lack of tools to face them, and have transformed into taboos what at the time could not be explained. Also fear has been used with a great amount of guilt. Jean Delumeau in «Fear. Reflections on its social and cultural dimension» cites Descartes because in his book «Treatise on the Passions of the Soul» (Descartes, 2017) he defines fear as an excess of cowardice: «cowardice is contrary to courage, like the fear or fear are fearlessness» (Delumeau, 2002). Another interpretation that we believe relevant to highlight is that of Jean Paul Sartre. He simply maintains that «he who is not afraid is not normal, that has nothing to do with courage» (Delumeau, 2002).

However, in correlation with the advance of civilization, these discourses were finding other forms of understanding and, therefore, they have been nourished by different values and meanings.

6. What are we afraid of?

According to the most radical classification on the essence of fear, we can distinguish two types: on the one hand, «visceral and natural» fears and, on the other hand, those originating from culture. Regarding the former, the explanation offered by Jean Delumeau is forceful: «fear is fundamentally the fear of death... for this reason fear will not disappear from the human condition» (Delumeau, 2002).

Jean Delumeau's reflection gives us a clue about the human essence: there are particularities that do not seem to change despite sociocultural evolutions. Somehow, we will always have fears. In this regard, the truth is that fears are renewed but also perpetuated in the memories of societies, of their individuals, more precisely (Delumeau, 2002).

In «The labyrinths of fear. A tour for the end of the century» clarifying issues are deepened:

> It is the specific people who experience fears, as forms of response, it is about the plane of the individual; however, it is society that builds the notions of risk, threat, danger and generates standardized response modes, updating both notions and response modes, according to different historical periods (Delumeau, 2002).

And he also maintains that «contemporary society, in addition to facing its own demons, carries the burden of demons inherited from the past» (Delumeau, 2002).

Providing a more current perspective, Isabella Pezzini affirms that «among the key words used to describe and characterize contemporary society is, without a doubt, fear».

What he explains below is that it is no longer enough to analyze public opinion from a cognitive dimension, but it is necessary to approach it from an emotional point of view (Peñamarín & Pezzini, 2016).

He also brings to the text the concept of liquidity coined by Zygmunt Bauman[19] to refer to the uncertainty and lack of security that is latent in today's societies:

> Generalized and vague fear, with renewed objectives that come to add to the previous ones, leads to a defensive attitude, fleeing from a danger so constantly warned that it almost seems to lead one to wait for what inspires fear to happen, ending up materializing suddenly. way or another (Peñamarín & Pezzini, 2016).

7. The link between fear and culture

The authors shed light on the mechanism of fear in society. His contribution is essential to understand that «it is in the territories of culture, where notions and modes of response are modalized, that is, they acquire their specificity through the mediation of culture» (Reguillo, 2000). In this process, belonging is a crucial value. The shared, the cultural that societies have in common is what shapes these fears. In this way, people feel part of a group that acts as a reference model (Reguillo, 2000).

19/ Zygmunt Bauman was a Polish-British sociologist, philosopher, and essayist. He developed the concept of «liquid modernity» and coined the corresponding term.

But, of course, this way of living under common rules supposes the transfer of individual worldviews in pursuit of certain norms and group interests. So it is that the institutions in charge of ensuring security, order and social cohesion have been licensed with powers that allow them to regulate and control the scope and limitations of citizens. This premise brings us closer to the next section, which will try to focus on the other object of study of this article: communication.

8. The communication of fear

This ancient process of overcoming fears has been addressed by multiple disciplines and subjects, each one according to the time and space in which it has had to act. All have left as a legacy significant contributions to the history of humanity. However, in this study, we will delve into one of them that is transversal to all time and action. Next, we present communication as a fundamental axis in the creation and diffusion of fear mechanisms.

The term communicate comes etymologically from the Latin *communicare* which means «sharing information, imparting, disseminating»; and this derives from *communis* that represents the «common, mutual, shared among several».

The root of the word «communicate» is shared with the concept of «community». This makes sense because communication is a social process that occurs between two people or a group of people who share certain values and norms. Furthermore, when communicating, people do not act individually but rather respond to a series of social roles (Piña Morán & Gómez Urrutia, 2019).

As Lisandra Cordero Durán maintains, culture is that place where communication processes germinate, where the meanings of the world are built. What this author reflects is that this communication-culture binomial is produced and fed back in the environment of social life (Cordero Durán, 2018).

In «Hannah Arendt and the limits of the public sphere» (Toro Carnevali, 2008), Alfredo Toro Carnevali brings to the text a quote from the renowned author:

> With word and action we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and assume the naked fact of our original physical appearance (...) Through action and speech men reveal who they are, actively reveal their identity and make their appearance in the world (Arendt, 1993).

«You are what you communicate» affirms Manuel Campo Vidal[20] in his book (Campo Vidal, 2018). This duly founded premise assigns special relevance to communication as a priority-regulating weapon. For his part, Tom Andersen[21] indicates that «language is not innocent», and, well, in any case, communication (and its construction) is not innocent either.

Although the media have always been protagonists in the social, political and cultural scene, these institutions have become elemental in the modern life that we know, hence the importance of decoding their influence, their techniques and their intentions. The media, not so

20/ Manuel Campo Vidal is a renowned Spanish journalist, sociologist and writer in the field of communication.
21/ Tom Andersen was a psychiatrist of Norwegian origin, author of the well-known phrase «language is not innocent».

much as social actors but also as mercantile groups, represent what certain power structures ask of them, indicate or offer. That is why we can come to think of the idea that those who have the communication tools on their side have the power to influence social groups.

9. Public sphere and media

Knowing about the «public sphere» is essential because it allows us to situate ourselves in the space where events take place. We can say, crudely, that it is the common square where each actor performs his function. And this joint staging offers us a portrait of how society works.

Now, from the theoretical approach, we find the ambassador of the concept: Jürgen Habermas. The German philosopher and sociologist indicates that what is public is open to all, referring to the role of the public sphere in making itself available in an accessible way to involve society in a critical debate about the common (Fuchs, 2014). This process is carried out as a group, not in isolation. Those who are part of this community discussion do so wrapped in specific shared interests.

The author Christian Fuchs explains it in the following way: «the public sphere is an interface that connects culture, economy and politics» (Fuchs, 2014). Moreover, he maintains that it depends on the last two fields. In addition, he reflects on the media as they are the ones who «circulate information such as news, entertainment or user-generated content» to «a wide variety of people.» That is why, in this skin, the public sphere must have«media for information and communication» (Fuchs, 2014).

Going deeper into the relationship with the media, Christian Fuchs explains that the media encompasses two dimensions: on the one hand, the cultural branch through which they produce and disseminate the information that creates social meanings; on the other hand, the economic-political edge «that allows ownership, control, production, dissemination and consumption of information» for which «they are specifically controlled and are channels for political information and debate» (Fuchs, 2014).

Taking another look, it is Alfredo Toro Carnevali who states in his article:

> It is in the public sphere, in the 'between of politics', where the individual manages to fulfill his human condition; it is the place of freedom, of collective memory and of action; and the place where it is possible to transcend merely individual existence (Toro Carnevali, 2008).

It also rescues what Hannah Arendt maintains regarding freedom, since it offers a clear premise regarding the importance of public space, that which unites. It reflects it like this:

> Public participation, that is, participation in the polis, is the highest expression of freedom. For the German-Jewish author, the public sphere illuminates public events, provides a space where men and women can be seen and heard, and reveal through action: speech and word, who they are. Public space is the common world, understood as a network of relationships between human beings, who permanently unite and separate (Toro Carnevali, 2008).

Within this section, we believe it is necessary to dedicate a few lines to explain the role of emotions in the public sphere, taking into account that fear as such –object of analysis of this study– belongs to the emotional human plane.

Isabella Pezzini has written a chapter on «Emotions in the New Public Sphere», an article in DeSignis Magazine, which she has baptized «Fear in the West in the Internet Age». In it, he maintains that «in the public sphere, affective dispositions operate by delimiting a pertinent way of feeling in front of an object that, in addition, allows modulating an enunciative place shared with others» (Peñamarín & Pezzini, 2016). In addition, it identifies that a community may have a shared affective disposition in relation to a certain public issue or object. Inspired by the author Vanesa Saiz Echezarreta (Saiz Echezarreta, 2012), Isabella Pezzini adds regarding this shared «feeling» that societies can evaluate a situation based on an emotion or a state of mind, since that which configures a certain point of view arises from the cognitive, affective and axiological fields (Peñamarín & Pezzini, 2016). And adds:

> Hence, affective dispositions, such as emotional habits, can be analyzed as central instances for morality, ethics and political practice since they participate in the regulation of our social life and allow us to define the purposes and priorities of the subjects in the sphere. public (Peñamarín & Pezzini, 2016).

María Isabel Míguez González points out in her article what Inger Jensen (Jensen, 2001) raises:

> The public sphere does not imply a set of common values and opinions, but it can influence the opinions that are formed in society and, although it does not necessarily generate agreements, it can influence the decisions made by individuals, institutions and citizens. governments (Míguez González, 2011).

However, Inger Jensen (Jensen, 2001) warns that public sphere discourse represents a civilized way of expressing disagreement around issues of common concern. For this reason, it does not represent a general or consensual position, but rather supposes «a dynamic complex of various conflicting positions» (Míguez González, 2011).

Regarding the relationship between the media and the public sphere, María Isabel Míguez González values the theory of her colleague Sylvia Sholar (Sholar, 1994) who states that:

> The media created and managed by different associative groups for their purposes, such as their own newspapers or magazines, could be considered as part of the processes of the public sphere. However, the same is not true of the commercial media, which present internal rules that limit the possibilities of public discourse (its employees and journalists filter the attempts of individuals to communicate in the public sphere) and often act as a space for related *publicity*. with economic and state interests (Míguez González, 2011).

Returning to the theory of Marshall McLuhan[22], we can affirm that the media –essential actors in the public sphere – shape what we see and the way in which we see it. For the Canadian philosopher, this molding power is such that it can modify not only individuals, but also society as a whole.

In «Reason and Word», we find certain keys to understand the configuration of the cultural gaze through the mediation of the media and with special focus on the technological role they

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22/ Herbert Marshall McLuhan was a Canadian philosopher, scholar, communication sociologist, and professor of literature.

have (Gómez Vargas, 1997). Héctor Gómez Vargas argues that the very nature of technical means turns them into instruments of «production, circulation and reception of symbolic forms». Furthermore, he maintains:

> The media design, facilitate and configure certain types of perceptions, cognitive apparatuses and logics, practices and sensibilities. Its social use implies perceiving in a certain way: having everything integrated into subjectivity, where the interconnections between the inner and outer world occur (Gómez Vargas, 1997).

In short, the media as social institutions that are «configuring an increasingly complex organization and structuring of cultural mediation.» And, as technology evolves and provides different communication formats, the structural organization of mediations will be affected as it will have to adopt new modes (Gómez Vargas, 1997).

10. Mediatized culture

To mediate is to intervene. Mediatized culture has a lot to do with this term because it is influenced, and influences, by and on social mechanisms. These influences are part of processes and have been part of human life since the earliest times.

In the text «Risk Communication and Fear Spirals», Jordi Farré Coma argues that mediatization processes were consolidated in the last third of the 20th century. This quality of current reality is seen in conflict with another characteristic of this time: «the imposition of a culture of risk, threat, insecurity and fear of a society and an individual in danger» (Farré Coma, 2005).

The uncertainty generated in this context is paradoxical if we take into consideration that the 21st century is a time characterized by innovations in the field of technology, science and information.

Dominique Wolton (Wolton, 2004) attributes this difficult present to three interrelated parameters: identity, culture and communication. And he argues that this «alters not only the relationships between the different levels of culture (elite, mass, media or popular), but also the relationship with social ties, society and politics» (Farré Coma, 2005).

What is perceived as «mediatized risk culture» has direct consequences on the formation of the so-called «cultures of fear». According to the article by Jordi Farré Coma, these make up a new social reality that penetrates both collective and personal identities.

Bauman (Bauman, 2002) expresses it this way:

> Allowing oneself to be trapped by the cultures of fear implies individual and collective surrender in the face of the growing uncertainties generated around the culture of risk and the extreme contradictions of capitalist globalization. The perverse consequences of fear affect the confidence of the citizenry that becomes a victim, the credibility of democratic institutions that question their legitimacy and, ultimately, all democratic systems, unable to rearticulate trapped in the cage of iron of (in) security (Farré Coma, 2005).

For his part, Jordi Farré Coma sums it up in an enlightening paragraph:

EIndeed, mass culture, the culture industry, popular culture and media cultures are obscured and traversed, *hic et nunc*,[23] by the culture of risk which, by leading to cultures of fear, only implies the reflection of fear of cultures (Farré Coma, 2005).

In another lane, we find the contribution of Ulrich Beck in his 1986 book «The Risk Society».[24] As explained in the text, «The labyrinths of fear. A journey to the end of the century», Beck argues that «society is moving from a "community of misery", typical of class society, to the community of fear, typical of risk society».

On the other hand, the text by Jordi Farré Coma (Farré Coma, 2005) discusses the «peculiar interaction between real risk and perceived risk» when it gains strength through its projection in the media. What he argues is that as perceived fear gains massive exposure, the growth of real latent risk becomes viable. In other words: «it generates the optical effect of making one think that if the media perception of revealed risk is growing, it is because the social production –the collective construction– of real risk is growing» (Gil Calvo, 2003:39).

Although each society develops its particularities according to its economic and sociocultural conditions, the concept of fear is modified –with respect to «first world» countries– in communities penetrated by social conflicts such as extreme poverty, crime and other violent problems, as well as in geographical points hit by the imminence of natural disasters.

The consideration of the contexts in which the fears of societies are configured is inseparable. Reguillo (Reguillo, 1999) reflects on the issue of perceived risk and the culture of fear, and concludes by addressing access to modernity:

At this time, he is facing the crisis of his paradigm that manifests itself in the growing outbreak of sociopolitical conflicts derived from inequality, in the return of a certain type of fundamentalism that modern reason believed eradicated, in the blurring of the Enlightenment dream that believed that progress was the key to achieve an equitable, harmonious and upward development (Reguillo, 2000).

To offer a real experience, we cite the case study of Pilar Riaño Alcalá in «The narrative routes of fears: Subjects, bodies and memories» where she approaches fear about the daily situation of the city of Medellín around the decade of 2000, where «the latent and omnipresent presence of fear has been covered with an institutional character» (Riaño Alcalá, 2002).

In this thesis, the author presents «various ways in which fear is built in social memory and the uses of fear and its narratives in daily life and in social and cultural dynamics.» In this sense and from these latitudes, he describes the exercise of violence by para-state institutions as systematic and arbitrary, and maintains that under these conditions fear becomes «a routinized reality and a permanent and chronic sensory state» (Riaño Alcalá, 2002).

It is Riaño Alcalá's text that brings together personalities such as Linda Green (1995), Beatriz Manz (1995) and Michael Taussig (1992) around the concept of «cultures of fear», since they have used it to ensure that fear is adopted as «a way of life that regulates communications, representations, responses, resistance and social memory» (Riaño Alcalá, 2002).

The influence of these so-called «cultures of fear» permeates so deeply in societies that «they reconfigure their cultures, order their lives, give meaning to social acts and resignify

23/ Latin expression that means «here and now».
24/ Ulrich Beck, *The risk society. Towards a new modernity*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 1998, p. 28.

their imaginaries of fear» (Jimeno, 1998) introduces Riaño Alcalá in his theoretical contribution (Riaño Alcalá, 2002).

11. Fears and media

In another section of this article «Risk communication and fear spirals» entitled nothing more and nothing less than «Fears and means», Jordi Farré Coma differentiates the voluntary risks to which we expose ourselves –such as driving in a car, taking a plane or even smoking– from the risks we perceive when exposed to the mediation of the media (Farré Coma, 2005).

It is necessary to take into account the contribution of Ferraro (Ferraro, 2002) who distinguishes the concept of fear from that of perceived risk:

> Fear is fundamentally a psychologically different experience from perceived risk. While risk involves a cognitive judgment, fear is much more emotional in character. Fear activates a series of complex bodily transformations that alert the actor to the possibility of danger (Farré Coma, 2005).

It happens that those risks that produce fear, being so closely incorporated into our daily lives, become imperceptible: we no longer notice them or their possible consequences. However, when risks become relevant on the scene and we can feel their effects on our security and integrity –we can think again about the coronavirus pandemic–, we are immediately capable of appraising with fear that the imminence of the concept of risk is already rather a factual fact. These situations have the full support of communication institutions that, with greater or lesser intensity and intention, bid to have our attention and to influence society's behavior at the citizen and political levels.

In this sense, it is essential to maintain that the media are central actors in the configuration of public space. However, there is no unanimity about its direct influence on societies. In Jordi Farré Coma's text, two opposing theories are put forward, which we will present below.

The first theory to consider dates back to 1970 and frames the media under its role as an institution busy evaluating, selecting, prioritizing, and amplifying information, that is, as mere producers of a social good.

Under a simplistic look, one could think that the media are sources of recontextualization (not at all innocent) of the social «frames». They have tools to achieve it: to name a few of them, we find negativity, distortion, dramatization or sensationalism. But, according to the article, adopting this premise as an explanation of the role of the media is to ignore «the complexity of mediated communication processes and the instrumental operations of the media» (Farré Coma, 2005).

This interpretation of the media suggests that they are active actors in communication and, therefore, this becomes a strategic process in which preferences and interests intervene. In addition, it is mentioned that –like all communication– it is aimed at a specific audience, fueled by specific sociocultural characteristics (Farré Coma, 2005).

Regarding audiences, it is essential to highlight that public opinion «continues to have access to the public space for the most part through the press, radio and television». This reality makes the complex situation even more complex when we are aware that the active

and diverse media feed an audience that is also active and, fundamentally, also diverse (Farré Coma, 2005).

In the text «Risk Communication and Fear Spirals» it is suggested that «the media are a resource for risk communicators who can take advantage of narratives, images, domestication and personalization of the consequences of perceived risk» (Farre Coma, 2005). La otra teoría es acuñada por David Altheide, sociólogo de la Universidad de Arizona. Según el texto de Jordi Farré Coma, Altheide pretende «contextualizar la naturaleza y el uso de la palabra 'miedo' en los medios de comunicación de Estados Unidos» (Farré Coma, 2005). En «Creating Fear. News and the Construction of Crisis» sostiene que es la misma lógica mediática de los medios de comunicación la que –a través de sus formatos– contribuye significativamente a la construcción del miedo en el contexto de comunidades mediadas, y lo vincula al concepto de control social (Farré Coma, 2005).

David Altheide (Altheide, 2002) defines it as follows:

> Fear plays an essential part in social control. There are various reasons for this. First, we examine the process that makes social control work. The things we fear are related to how we communicate and learn in everyday life (...) Social life in the United States and most industrialized societies have drifted towards a 'risk society', organized around communication aimed at police surveillance, risk control and prevention (Farré Coma, 2005).

However, despite the fact that there is a predisposition to believe that the media are synonymous with the production of adverse consequences, the author does not assure –he even questions– the fact that the media are influential in creating fear or perceptions of risk in society because «the media amplify or attenuate, but do not cause the sense of risk in society» (Farré Coma, 2005).

On this edge, in another text, Teodoro León Gross tells us that it is «more difficult to manage fear of crime than crime itself.» In this sense, he blames the media for its alarmist and, specifically, morbid nature. It also maintains that «news about blood crimes are seven times more frequent than the real rate of these; and these nutrients foster a collective imagination full of troubled anxiety» (León Gross, 2009).

For his part, in «The imaginary of fear. Fears and the Media», Barata (1996) states that «the alarmism displayed by the press inflames the fears and insecurities present in the collective imagination» (Arella, 2008).

In this same text by Celeste I. Arella, special attention is given to the power of amplification of the media in the collective imaginaries, since they are «the great public showcase that grants entity and presence» to those «people, groups or ideas that seek some kind of social repercussion» (Arella, 2008). In this way, the premise is evidenced that certain interests or social conflicts become visible beyond their own circles when they acquire prominence in the media.

By way of conclusion of this section, it is necessary to remember that fears have been a fundamental stone of human life as we know it; however, the interpretation of its current role occupies us with special relevance. Jordi Farré Coma synthesizes in one sentence that «fear is part of language» when he explains that citizens have incorporated fear into their daily lives since it is part of popular culture (Farré Coma, 2005), and, of course, the information culture.

12. Conclusions

This study has sought to return to different bibliographies that define fear from its origins, and in particular the nuances that relate it to the media. Deciphering its characteristics and its different roles throughout humanity is not an easy task, but it is essential to understand the complex social, political and cultural fabric in which we are immersed. We have tried to address it both at the individual level and from the conformation of the public sphere.

Fear and its impact on the way of life have been outlined in this article as an edge to be considered from the sociological, psychological, social, health, cultural point of view and other branches of study, but, above all, as a phenomenon that we must not lose sight of in the everyday and in the exceptional because we have witnessed, through these pages, a chain of arguments taken from different perspectives that warn about the performative power of fear in past, present and future societies.

Before saying goodbye, we offer a reflection on the impact of fear on the way of life and the relationship of the individual with the public sphere of which he is a part. It was written by the American historian and social critic Christopher Lasch in 1979 and recovered by Joaquín Estefanía in a column he wrote for the newspaper El País:

> After the political whirlwind of the sixties, social citizens retreat to merely formal issues. With no hope of improving their lives in any of the ways that really mattered, people became convinced that what was important was personal psychic improvement: contentment with feelings, eating healthy foods, taking ballet or belly dancing classes, imbibing the Eastern wisdom, endless walking, jogging, learning to relate, overcoming the fear of pleasure. Harmless in themselves, these searches, when they are elevated to the category of program and rise up in the rhetoric of austerity and the opening of consciences, imply a distancing from politics and a rejection of the recent past (Estefanía, 2011).

It is a fervent wish of these authors that fear (the fear that pushes from behind to the front) becomes a part of our personal and social lives. To overcome personal fears, the lines are written inwards. But for the collective management of social fears, we long for citizen courage, commitment and deep determination, first, in the formation of strong, sensitive and transparent institutions, and second and fundamental, equal opportunities in the daily struggles of societies to progress in a fair and free horizon.

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