Reviews

Fear of Crime – Critical Voices in an Age of Anxiety, edited by Murray Lee and Stephen Farrall, Routledge-Cavendish, 2009 (ISBN 978-0-415-43692-2, 217)

There is an old Woody Allen gag from his stand up days in which he describes how he was failed in his philosophy exam for cheating: by looking into the soul of the student sitting next to him.

As discussed in the contributions of Dennis Loo and Murray Lee to *Fear of Crime – Critical Voices in an Age of Anxiety*, since the 1960s, a similar although grander endeavour has proliferated around knowledge of what Robbie Sutton and Stephen Farrall call the 'interior landscapes' of citizens. In what has become a formidable branch of the general crime control industry, the everyday fears of citizens are regularly surveyed, catalogued, monitored, enumerated, quantified, managed, assuaged, circulated, stimulated, and catered for by the market; in short, these fears are entered into discourse in general and particularly into quantitative discourse.

Yet, mainstream fear of crime research has generally betrayed little appreciation of the 'thorny problems' involved in such social inquiry, let alone the wider political ramifications of it. It has preferred instead to see itself as a technical, neutral exercise in a manner perhaps redolent of Michel Foucault's rather withering general observation about criminology: 'that it is of such utility, is needed so urgently and rendered so vital for the working of the system, that it does not even need to seek a theoretical justification for itself, or even simply a coherent framework' (Foucault 1980:47). Once established with solid institutional supports, something that fear of crime managed fairly quickly, any sense of its own history and contingency, of what it does culturally and politically, or even what fear of crime means, is banished from the mind of the researcher and the research establishment.

More recently, a theoretically-informed, inter-disciplinary and critical body of research on fear of crime has begun to develop which opens up these questions to inquiry. *Fear of Crime – Critical Voices in an Age of Anxiety* is a fine sample of that work, reflecting as it does its diverse concerns and approaches and demonstrating how various disciplines and methods can contribute to knowledge and understanding of fear of crime. For some scholars, words like 'critical' and 'theoretical' signal a disinterest in the nitty-gritty of empirical inquiry but this is not at all the case with this collection. On the contrary, most of the contributions combine an exploration of key conceptual questions or themes (like the meaning of fear, which several of the chapters tackle in different ways) with an elucidation of their methodological implications and/or the presentation of research findings from empirical studies undertaken by the authors. What they share is scepticism towards the staple instrument in fear of crime research, the mass survey, and the complex but often unpacked assumptions that underpin it.

In the opening chapter of the collection, Dennis Loo provides a critical account of the context in which crime was elevated to a political issue in the USA in the 1960s, focusing in particular on the political use and manipulation of polls and surveys. Loo's critique primarily relates to the misuse of survey evidence. But, *contra* the view that fear of crime surveys are, or could be, a neutral instrument for tapping into a unitary object – fear – that is

objective, timeless and was simply awaiting the attention of researchers and criminologists in the era, Murray Lee explores the administrative and political constitution of crime fear and the 'fearing subject' effected in large part by this new apparatus of knowledge. Lee also examines some of the contemporary domains in which fear of crime as a regime of power/knowledge operates, how such knowledge is reported, circulated and objectified, and how it enters cultural life as a schema for identifying, classifying, rendering intelligible, communicating and ordering personal experience. The realm of the subjective, the 'interior landscapes' of the individual, is thus made amenable to governance and linked to political rationalities and intervention strategies in relation to law enforcement, urban planning and the like.

Susan Smith and Rachel Pain track the migration of the discourse of fear from crime into the domain of the geo-political, linked to the advent of apparently novel risks in the twenty-first century – those of global terrorism, environmental disaster, infectious disease and immigration. These contributors detect a separation in political and much academic discourse of the 'new' geo-political fears from everyday (crime) fears and a privileging of the former; and this in circumstances where the character and sources of these new fears are largely assumed, with little attention being given to their empirical mapping let alone the lessons to be drawn from critical research and theory around fear of crime. As geographers, Smith and Pain note the ways in which discourses of fear have always been spatialised – most obviously in the 'global' fear of crime question at the core of general surveys that links fear to public space and strangers – but also in critical, in-depth, qualitative research that explores the experience of everyday fear and treats it as complex and contextual. They argue for the need to 'splice' the everyday and the geo-political together, 'to develop a spatial politics of fear that not only includes "global" and "local", but finds ways to bring them together in one account' (p47) This, Smith and Pain argue, requires a new model in which the two are woven together in what they call 'assemblages of fear'.

Whereas Smith and Pain are centrally concerned with fears themselves, Leanne Weber and Murray Lee's chapter is more heavily focused on the politics gathering around new geo-political fears. These fears are seen as in an important sense 'contrived', in order to justify and legitimise the adoption of new modes of 'pre-emptive governance' over the dangers and threats that characterise late modern, 'risk societies'.

The gendered nature of crime fears has been a recurrent theme in the existing literature with the focus on the heightened fears of women compared to men. Kristen Day's original contribution moves the debate from women's experience of fear to the male experience of *being* feared in public space and its implications for identity and autonomy of the feared, particularly race and ethnic minority men. Being assigned to the category of fearful has a self-fulfilling dimension. It marginalises but at the same time creates an alternative channel for asserting power and identity.

In a chapter that demonstrates the close links between sophisticated conceptual and methodological aspects of fear of crime research, Robbie Sutton and Stephen Farrall explore the implications of deceptive responses in such research. This is not a problem merely of dishonesty on the part of respondents, but more fundamentally of how survey research requiring respondents to translate private experience ('interior landscapes') into the structured survey format necessarily involves interpretive processes in which an array of social, cultural and political factors are likely to play a part, including prevailing public discourses around fear of crime. Taking the issue of gender and fear and relying on their own empirical research, Sutton and Farrall show how the oft-observed 'fact' uncovered by surveys that women are more fearful than men may stem simply from the cultural belief,

widely held by both men and women, that women are more fearful. This belief conditions how men and women respectively interpret, translate and represent private experience and feelings, it being less easy for men than women to acknowledge vulnerability given the incompatibility with conventional notions of masculinity. The consequence is that a naïve survey method becomes part of a self-perpetuating cycle, generating a 'positive feedback loop', which serves to further validate and entrench the cultural belief in question without elucidating the nature and source of the belief, let alone the private fears of men and women.

In other words, deceptive responses are not merely a problem to be surmounted: 'The study of this phenomenon promises to lead to a deeper understanding of the dynamics between the private *experience* of fear of crime, overt *expressions* of fear of crime, the public *idea* of the fear of crime, and wider social and political processes' (emphasis in original) (p118). This points to other possibilities inviting inquiry, like a consideration of the way in which political factors may influence the interpretation and representation of private experiences of fear. These insights move debate beyond the more simplistic and conspiratorial arguments that crime fears are manipulated for political purposes by concretely linking up the politics of fear with the particularities of the research process and identifying the more complex and subtle processes that might be involved. Sutton and Farrall also provide methodological suggestions for disentangling and exploring these dynamics in empirical research.

Three chapters redress the conspicuous, and odd, neglect of the psychology of fear in fear of crime research. Using concepts and methods drawn from the psychoanalytic tradition, David Gadd and Tony Jefferson outline the elements of a psychosocial approach to fear of crime centred on the fearful *individual*. This does not deny the social meaning or construction of fear but, by way of addition, asks and seeks to answer the question of what it is, psychosocially, about particular individuals that makes them vulnerable to late modern insecurities and thus investment in the position of fearing subject made available in the social discourse of fear of crime. In his contribution, Jon Jackson uses the social psychology of risk perception as an important component of his attempt to build another kind of bridge between the psychological and the social dimensions of fear of crime. As is the case with Gadd and Jefferson, this does not involve supplanting or moving away from the sociological and criminological analyses of fear of crime. The narratives of risk and danger made available within a culture are critical to individual risk perception and fear. In their chapter, Derek Chadee, Nikiesha Virgil and Jason Ditton explore, both conceptually and empirically, the relationship between fear of crime and anxiety. All three of these contributions concerning the psychology of fear show how fear of crime can serve as a repository for other anxieties of a more diffuse kind or which, seated in the unconscious, are too troubling for the individual to face up to.

In the closing substantive chapter, Mike Enders, Christine Jennett and Marian Tulloch explore the relationship between fear of crime and social cohesion in two Sydney suburbs, drawing out the implications for public policy and law enforcement that now expressly target the reduction of fear as an objective independent of crime control and prevention. The authors highlight the importance of local differences in the factors that shape community fear of crime.

In a keynote address at the 15th World Congress of Criminology in 2008, David Garland stressed that for criminology to remain a vibrant intellectual project, and not merely a successful governmental one, it must continually seek renewal from outside, from other disciplines and perspectives. *Fear of Crime – Critical Voices in an Age of Anxiety* is an

exemplary demonstration of the value of Garland's point and of the intellectual benefits to be garnered from a critical, open, venturesome criminology.

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Reference

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