

OLIGARCHS 'SELL' US THE FEELING OF DANGER

Jacques Rancière



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We should be more suspicious regarding the idea of 'mass fear'. Our governments and intelligentsia readily attribute the phenomena of fear and hate to the masses, thereby posturing themselves in the position of enlightened persons who have essentially overcome popular passions. But the fact is that fear today is propagated by various governments.

This is what the pervasive notion of security now means. It unites all kinds of dangers that can threaten individuals and societies, and it makes 'insecurity' our state of being and our form of consciousness. Our governments thus present themselves as being devoted to the task of security. In that way, manipulation becomes structural.

But I don't think that an increase of information and communication technologies increases fear. This view is in keeping with an old idea of the role of rumours in the spreading of mob violence. But wherever information is free, it is actually the contrary: an increase in information means the multiplication of the sources of verification, which are available to everybody, therefore providing the possibility to put the messages of fear in perspective.

For example, if you type 'terrorism' on your computer, you will not be very frightened by the multiplicity of information you obtain. But our governments proceed differently. They tell us that they know about an impending terrorist attack in a big capital. But, of course, the information is classified and we have no means to verify it. We must believe that it is true and, in the case that nothing happens, that the government was well informed and took the right measures to protect us against the danger.

Fear is a feature of the State in general, in two respects. First, the State has to be a source of fear for its respective subjects. Second it also works by creating fears among its subjects and presenting itself as the force that will ultimately protect them against all those threats. In the case of totalitarian states, the first aspect is dominant: the subjects have to live in a continuous state of fear, they can be denounced by anybody at any time, etc. Our so-called democratic states emphasises the second aspect. They continuously unfold the plot of insecurity, which becomes an all-encompassing notion, including terrorism as well as such factors as climate change, petty crime, in addition to unemployment, immigrants, major snowfalls, financial crises, or toxic substances in Chinese toys.

They turn any fact into a matter of fear and handle that fear instead of addressing the facts. When workers lose their job because their company is in the process of relocating abroad, they tell us that they are 'anxious about their future', which means that they turn their own incapacity to protect workers or to create new jobs opportunities into a pathological state of the people. This is so because our states are less and less able to thwart the destructive effects of the free circulation of capital on the communities that are under their care — all the less so because they have no desire to do so.

They then fall back on what is in their power — the circulation of people — that is, the protection of 'national identity' against immigrants and, more widely, the management of security, which is

in fact the management of the feeling of insecurity. This work is increasingly becoming their purpose and their means of legitimisation. Now the process of legitimisation cannot be attributed to democracy. On the contrary, it basically attests to the lack of democracy: there is less and less democratic discussion and control over common affairs. More and more of the public discussion is confiscated by governments and experts who treat the citizens as disabled persons and they set out to cure their diseases, which in fact means maintaining them in the status of disabled persons who are in need of good doctors.

Our so-called 'democratic states' are becoming more and more oligarchic states run by a restricted class of politicians, who are very closely connected with the representatives of financial power. It is true that their power works through a constant management of insecurity. But this means that **'modern fears' are not so much irrational fears of the masses as they are a feeling of 'insecurity' that has been nurtured by state policies.** Our governments and intelligentsias readily present those policies as a way of pacifying forms of popular violence against such groups as immigrants, strangers, etc. The success of far-right parties in several European countries appears to sustain this view. But I think that it is actually the contrary situation: far-right parties are, in fact, satellites of state policies. The State nurtures the feeling of insecurity because it wants people to feel insecure and impotent. Far-right parties attribute a name and a face to those who embody the enemy of security. Again, this has very little to do with democracy. On the contrary, it has to do with the lack of democracy.

Rest assured, security is what our oligarchies will sell us more and more, because this is what costs them the least and yields them the highest profit. The media go with the grain so-to-speak: at the same time, they play on the exhibition of everything that needs to be feared and with the learned demystification of irrational fear.

Now there is something misleading in this fact when we think of it in terms of the market and commodities. The question is about what kind of services our governments provide us: for instance, do they work to create education and job opportunities for their populations or do they work to provide them feelings of security or insecurity? Just as important, do the people act as political subjects or as consumers of state fantasies? ■

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THE AUTHORITIES PLAY WITH MASS FEARS



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Public fears are inherent in any society, whether they be democratic or totalitarian ones. Democracy, in contrast to totalitarianism, envisages a significantly larger involvement in the public process. The fear of changes, of course, does not disappear because of its existence, but people also have the sense that they can influence what is going on.

During recent years, democratic countries have felt a fear of a number of factors: fear of terrorism, fear of the financial crisis, fear of migrants. And modern society has seemingly coped with everything. **In the current situation in Russia, it would be difficult to initiate some sort of a new global public fear. That is, unless someone were to come up with a brilliant or disgusting move in relation to political technologies,** which would result in the development of some form of an even more dangerous fear. In this context, a lot depends on the authorities, because, along with oil and gas, the social resource is also one of its major resources. The authorities depend on the social medium, so they are forced to play to mass fears and to use them.

Time has shown that the fear of terrorism in Russia has, for the most part, been an instigated fear. Of course, explosions have been heard, but quite a lot of other different events have also taken place here apart from that. This fear

has become one of the political mechanisms used to build the new Russia. Today the fear of terrorism is almost gone, and even the recent blasts in the Moscow metro have not done much to reanimate it.

The fear of migrants is much less powerful in Russia today than it used to be. New migrants do not tend to come from the Caucasus, and about 30% of those who came earlier have even returned home over the last two years. There is indeed a fear of migrants, but it is not the dominant fear these days. Of course, it can be fomented, but it is actually not strong at present.

Any fears are very dangerous in our current situation, given the lack of horizontal connections and public institutions, when the people have almost no solid foundation or internal ideological justifications. In instances where people begin to experience mass fears, it may appear to be that they are unified. However, in reality, this is really disassociation. What otherwise is a seeming unification ultimately serves to destroy people on a personal level. They cling even more tightly to their separate lives and to the 'me against everyone' ideology, and they are becoming more tense and aggravated. In Russia, unlike in the West, there is virtually no place where tranquility and kindness tend to be the dominant feelings. ■