



CIPRIANI COLLEGE OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES

THE FEAR OF CRIME AND SECURITY IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO.

If we are truthful to ourselves, we can say without hesitation that our fears are many and varied. Members of the society of different social, gender, and age categories are haunted by their fears. Society today is characterized by a combination of elements that can be referred to as the disembeddedness of everyday life, the awareness of pluralism of values, and individualism which presents the achievement of self-realization as an ideal.

Violence is today diffusing at an alarming pace and society is having a difficult time coping with all its facets. The social roots of these acts of diffused violence appear to be based on the desegregation of the organizing principles of social solidarity, the crisis of the traditional conception of social rights to provide a framework for thinking about the excluded.

Social reality is today assuming the existence of insuperable conflicts. We are living in a conflictual society in which plurality, discontinuity, and dispersal exist. We are experiencing the phenomenon of disaffiliation and the breakdown of relations of 'otherness', the dilution of the bonds between oneself and the others. Today, inclusion and exclusion are occurring concurrently, creating the formation of a bulimic society where massive cultural inclusion is accompanied by systematic structural exclusion.

Changes are taking place in social institutions such as the family, religion and the justice system (police, prisons, mental health) and effectively transforming the socialization processes; and as such our society is going through a process of crisis and deinstitutionalization.

The landscape of insecurity and uncertainty is very evident. Crime and violence are being transformed in orientation and presentation. The multiple forms of violence such as violent crime, social exclusion, gender violence, school violence and other forms are increasingly evident in our society. The definition of crime as we know it, has changed. Aggression, violence and apathy are societal in their orientation. Aggressors are today multiple; and this creates the likelihood of becoming a victim is conceptualized as normal, and in many cases even accepted. To be sure, one can conceptualize that the causes of crime are widespread, and that crime has become part of the continuum of our social normality.

Crime's relationship with society is constitutive, and this results in the creation of a space for action which is both public and private, and occurs in social spaces in dispute such as neighbourhoods, malls, private properties, streets or other areas of contact. The social control of crime is expanded to facilitate multiple government agencies and informal actions including a strong presence of private security. The efficacy and efficiency of formal social control are associated with many problems.

We are today taking part in a society where the general population is experiencing a feeling of discontent and insecurity. To be sure, this malaise is transforming society into an obsessive preoccupation with

individualism and personal safety. Social inequality becomes the central concept to explain the roots of diffused violence, so we all can express how we feel about the kind of processes that are responsible for the global and local inequality/insecurity that we are experiencing. All of us are affected by the exacerbated individualism and cult narcissism that break the sociability bonds

We need to be careful and have responsibility for our thoughts, perceptions and perspectives. In this regard we look to the mass (and social) media to present a true picture of our reality. Reporting crime by the media may make victimization imaginable, especially if it is 'brought home' when the victim is seen to be similar to ourselves or the event occurs in familiar circumstances/places. While we have responsible established media houses that report crime, we need to hold them responsible to the highest standards of journalism and trust that they do not unnecessarily dramatize, sensationalize, and report only the most serious crimes, which set the agendas that frame public opinion. Sociologists have found that mass media reports and hearing about crimes from family members and friends had different impacts on the perceived societal and personal risk levels. This means that any person can be influenced by (for example) the media to feel that the risk for society is larger than previously thought, but this heightened risk judgment will not greatly affect personal risk judgment.

Finally, as members of society, we must recognize that we all have a lot of work still to be done before we can accomplish the feeling of a safe society. The social world has created dangerous and oppressive trends in crime and crime control that have occurred in the last decade that are fundamentally rooted in the political economy.

Dr. Valentine Smith (Senior Fellow, CCLCS)