

“Security from Below”: Humanizing Security in Contexts of Chronic Violence

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Introduction

Traditionally, the field of security policy has been associated with conservative worldviews which focus on order and stability and avoidance or management of conflict and change. Security provision has been about specialist agencies, expert analysts and top-down policy approaches. As an academic and policy field it is highly gendered (Tickner 1995) and state-centred (Carr 1946; Morgenthau 1948; Waltz 1979). It has traditionally focused on threats to strategic national state interests from without and also within. However, over the two decades or so, this has been challenged from various quarters. Most recently, there has been a move to widen the meaning of security and to recognize that it is not just about the State but about citizens as well. Security, it is argued, is linked to the wellbeing of communities, and this must include protection from hunger, diseases, violence and repression, as well as consolidation of democracy and social justice (UNDP 1994). The idea of human security encourages governments, policy makers and other organizations to give value and attention to a broader range of threats to life than is normally recognized, particularly in the global South.

However this shift from state-centred to human-centred security has uncovered the weakness of the State and the difficulties it faces in protecting people from increasingly complex forms of insecurity. It has also increased international and social demands on states, which are now asked to protect their citizens from chronic threats in a particular moment in history during which their ability to provide even basic protection from physical threats of violence and attack is in crisis and undermined by global phenomena. The spread of ‘new wars’ in the global South has highlighted the limitation of State security provision, but there are also increasing problems of urban and rural violence in countries that had post war peace agreements and even in those who have experienced no war at all. For example, in the mid 1990s the number of homicides among young men aged 15 to 44 in Brazil was higher than that of Colombia, a country recognised to be in the midst of a civil war (WHO 2002).

This weakness of the State security response has contributed to a gradual erosion of the idea of security as a public good, as well as loss of faith in state security provision. Many people on the ground already depend on private and informal forms of security and justice provision. Wealth and poverty determines the choice: private security firms on the one hand and local gunman on the other. Some now argue for a shift from the focus on state provision in favour of more support for non-state providers in post-conflict and fragile states. They include commercial, informal and community forms of justice and security delivery (Baker and Scheye 2007:154). In many such contexts, it is argued, the
State sector will simply never deliver in the short to medium term and alternatives need to be found based on local realities.

‘Security from below’, we argue, should not be a substitute for security as a public good. The challenge, however, is how the latter can be constructed in contemporary contexts of multiple violences and insecurity, with weak States, corrupt and non accountable security institutions and with powerful global networks trafficking arms and drugs that foster violence and further erode the State’s legitimate monopoly over the means of violence. Rather than widen the idea of security to embrace ever more areas of human interaction, we need to ‘humanize’ security provision, or make it people-centred but publicly delivered, and in ways that promote non violent forms of human interaction, encourage civil participation and protect women, children and vulnerable youth from abuse. We believe that ‘security from below’ is about encouraging people to think about their security as they do about their food, livelihood and human rights; it is of equal importance.

Security provision must be provided by public institutions, but it needs to be founded on agreed norms and shared values. It also has to respond to contextualized needs in ways that are legitimate and respectful of human rights. These norms may well have to be constructed from ‘below’. Developing norms and principles which are compatible with public provision may be one of the particular challenges of our times, and there are contexts today where it is not yet conceivable that the State can or will take on the task. Indigenous and community forms of justice may be the only viable forms in some contexts. However, there are many challenges on how these are best reconciled with mainstream processes and what is meant by publicly agreed norms and shared values, when these have not yet been democratically constructed. While there may be a need to recognise transitional community level security and justice forms, these should, we argue, contribute to building universal norms which can help construct effective State provision rather than substitute for it.

In order to analyse how “security from below” could help humanize security provision in contexts of chronic violence, our chapter begins by exploring the implications of the discursive shift from state-centred to citizen and human-centred security. Drawing mostly on examples from Latin America and based on our initial research activities in Guatemala and Colombia, we then explore the signs of the crisis in practice, as well as the community, market and donor agency led responses to the crisis that have emerged. We critically analyze their limitations and question how we can move from failing public provision to security as a fairly distributed and effective public service. We finally argue that “security from below” in the specific contexts under discussion, could help analytically and in practice to build norms and principles to inform contemporary security approaches. By drawing attention to real and diverse contexts of security provision, ‘security from below’ seeks to focus on the relevance and effectiveness of prevailing forms of public and non public security provision. It asks how far these facilitate participation for social change and democratic development? If security is to be judged by such criteria, it requires new debate to be opened up at the grass roots level, democratically embedding a sense of what is right and appropriate in communities which
have become increasingly subjected to the arbitrary imposition of certain concepts of perverse ‘order’ in the name of security.

**From State-centred to Human-centred Security**

As an academic field and as a policy making enterprise, security has been dominated by a Western understanding of world politics. It has been focused on the protection of the international system born in Europe in the 17th century which regards state sovereignty and power competition as the driving forces of international life. Over the last two decades, however, traditional theories focused on the requirements of state survival and power preservation have been challenged. Liberals, critical theorists, constructivists, feminists and an influential community of international NGOs and institutions have all contributed to the articulation of an alternative approach to security focused on the protection of individuals and communities.

The field of security has now been opened to new perspectives and has suggested new challenges for security provision. By denying the alleged universalism and neutrality of realist definitions of security obsessed with state security and survival (Wendt 1992; Cox 1981) and criticising the restrictive focus of traditional security studies as inadequate to contemporary realities (Linklater 1990; Booth 1991; Wyn Jones 1999), scholars and policy makers have been invited to consider individuals as the main referents of any security endeavour.

By exposing the deep connection existing between highly hierarchical social relations and boundaries between women and men, rich and poor and insiders and outsiders and the highly exclusionary traditional definition of security (Tickner 1995:180), new feminist perspectives have also challenged the traditional discourse of security and highlighted new issues relevant to the protection of human lives and communities. It is now widely accepted that the protection of individuals and their liberties and the creation of contexts that enable human wellbeing are the main challenges of this century.

All these contributions and the pre-eminence of the concept of Human Security after the publication of the UNDP Human Development Report in 1994 have contributed to taking security out from the secrecy and closeness associated with intelligence, military and defence circles. Although there is still no agreement on the definition of Human Security, it is generally accepted that it places the protection and welfare of individuals as the primary concern of any security approach, something that seems difficult to achieve through traditional military means. Human security is not only a comprehensive concept, it is also a campaign to open up security thinking to new fields and to bring security practices closer to contemporary human problems. Appealing to the core idea of ‘humanness’, this broadened concept has made ‘security’ a concept of relevance to the left as well as the right, to women as well as to men, to the global South as well as the global North, to non Western societies and to academics and practitioners of almost all sciences and fields.
The discursive shift in the field of security has raised new demands on the State. Under the new paradigm the State loses its preponderance but gains responsibilities. Contemporary states must not only protect individuals and communities from a wider set of threats, but they should also create conditions for wellbeing and social justice, be respectful of democratic values and human rights and be accountable to society. However, rather than strengthening their infrastructural capacity, states have increasingly lost their ability to restrain the impact of transnational phenomena, to maintain their legitimate monopoly of coercion and to be responsive to local needs, especially in the global South.

The Human Security approach suggests multilayered and multi-area interventions and implies new political and institutional landscapes at national and international levels to protect individuals and communities. However, State institutions have not substantially changed or properly adjusted in that direction over the last two decades. On the contrary, despite national and international attempts to reform the security sector in many countries, traditional assumptions, practices and values are still deeply entrenched in state institutions and social groups. Public responses to insecurity very often slip towards authoritarianisms and they also lack transparency and accountability. Citizens in heightened states of fear are often encouraged themselves to support hard line and authoritarian public responses. At the same time neoliberal-led globalization has reduced the emphasis on building public coffers or increasing public provision, and it has made attractive the possibility of handing over the provision of some services, including security, to private actors that are regarded as economically more efficient than the state.

One of the most evident signs of crises in security provision is the lack of effective protection from physical violence, the basic aspect of security. An estimated 7 million violence-caused deaths occurred, 75% of them civilian, in the world between 1993 and 2003 (Smith and Braein, quoted in Hurwitz and Peake 2004:1). The instigation of internal wars in the post-Cold War period as well as an increase in the levels of crime and delinquency around the globe, especially but not exclusively in growing urban concentrations of the global South, are responsible for most of those deaths. In its many forms, violence is increasing in urban as well as in rural areas, affecting the life of millions of people and producing a growing sense of insecurity that paralyzes cooperative social interaction, decreases wellbeing, obstructs democratization and undermines states’ credibility. In Latin America where according to the WHO violence was the first cause of death in 1999, violence seems to be growing at an epidemic pace. The growth in homicide rates has affected countries with historically low rates such as Costa Rica and Argentina, as well as countries with a history of internal wars and high levels of violence such as Colombia or El Salvador.

It is not our aim to discuss here the causes of this increase in the levels of violence but the responses that have emerged and their limitations. However, it is worth highlighting that only in some cases, the levels of violence are linked to the legacy of fought wars or like in Colombia, partially fed by the ongoing conflict. But in all cases, violence and a sense of insecurity are being fostered by the opportunities offered by globalization for illegal trafficking of drugs and arms, by the negative effects of forced implementation of
neoliberal reforms in deeply unequal societies, by unhalted intergenerational processes of violence transmission, by the failure of current public policies and state institutions, by the expansion of a dominant consumption orientated culture that measures success by capital and goods accumulation and by a problematic and manipulated socialization of youth in the global South and North'. Any response to the growing insecurity and violence in contexts of complex violence will have to take into account these phenomena and the way in which they interact in particular local contexts in order to succeed.

It is in this kind of context that public security provision, as it is conceived now, is proving ever more inadequate for the task. It is not only inadequate in terms of the quantity and resources dedicated by the State to protect communities, but also in the quality of the provision and its assumptions about the best way to tackle insecurity. In many cases the State does not have a legitimate monopoly of violence and certainly not over the entire territory, and where there is provision, it often abuses rather than protects the population. The following are some of the symptoms of this crisis in public security:

In some contexts, the crisis has led to the emergence of parallel communities where coercion is exercised outside the institutional framework of the State. This is the case even where States are relatively strong (e.g. Brazil) as well as where they are weak (e.g. Guatemala). In these communities the State is normally not capable of providing basic services, including security, and its intervention is often intermittent, reactive and disciplinary rather than protective. One of the characteristics of these parallel communities is that State institutions such as the police are not the main, or best equipped, or even desirable providers of protection. Alternative actors normally connect to lucrative illegal or informal economic activities, and to facilitate these, they replace the State and often act interchangeably as coercive ‘protectors’ for some sectors of the population creating protection rackets.

In these communities, the state-society relationship is often characterized by mutual distrust and even resentment. One of the most critical examples of the emergence of areas where coercive protection is provided outside the institutional frontier of the State is the case of Comuna 13 in Medellin, the second biggest city of Colombia. For more than three decades armed groups have fought for the control of this area. Citizens living there have continuously demanded protection from the violent domination exerted by the armed groups that has included threats, murders, massacres and forced displacement. The desperate demands for protection have been temporarily met by successive armed groups that replace their opponents only to use similar techniques in their attempt to exterminate them and to gain control of the territory and of their people. It was not until 2002 that the State attempted to retake control through a military operation. Given the methods, excesses, abuses and the level of violence used, this State intervention was initially difficult to differentiate from the many other interventions that coercive actors carried out in the past. However, Operación Orion, as it was called, has been seen as a successful step towards the pacification of the Comuna 13. It helped to reduce the number of homicides and successfully eliminated one of the groups in dispute. Nevertheless six years later it is evident that the intervention has not managed to remove the deep causes of violence in the Comuna. It is not clear yet that the State is the only and effective
provider of security in the area, or that the reduction in the number of crimes perpetrated is due to a deep transformation in the community. Although the local government has tried to reform traditional politics, supported the demobilization of former combatants and opened spaces to local participation in the city, in terms of security, the police and other state institutions still do not have absolute control over the situation. There are powerful actors in the city who people still fear. Some of these actors provide some sort of order and decide the fate of whoever is seen as a threat to their interests. The long succession of offers of ‘security’ and order supplied through repression and violence by different actors is not over yet.

The crisis in security provision makes more problematic the lack of connection between the State’s objectives and local communities’ needs. In contexts of violence, communities need to be protected and helped to build more secure environments. However public security provision tends to focus on eliminating enemies or competitors to their territorial control and not on mitigating the perverse effects of insecurity and violence on people’s lives. That is why sometimes the methods used by the police and military forces cause more unrest, fear and insecurity amongst the local population. This lack of communication between communities and police institutions in contexts of chronic violence is responsible for misconceptions and distrust. It not only affects the identification of priorities for a responsive security provision but also the legitimacy of the methods used by the state in ‘securing or pacifying’ dangerous areas.

In Colombia in 1994 surveys among citizens were carried out in order to ask citizens about their views and esteem of the service provided by the police. These revealed that one of the biggest problems was the systematic distancing between the police and local communities. Recognition of this has, in some cases, promoted the implementation of community policing approaches. Such approaches do contain seeds of an alternative way of seeing public provision, as measured, for instance, by whether people feel secure rather than the number of criminals arrested. However, in practice, community police are often not valued by the rest of the police force, and the trust building they require is undermined by their colleagues. In Medellin, we found that the community police were seen as the ‘soft’ even ‘feminized’ side of the hard, masculine and ‘real’ policeman’s work; their good reputation was useful when police colleagues needed to perform operations or gather intelligence, but it then eroded when the community police were included in police military style operations (Abello Colak and Pearce 2008).

Another symptom of the crisis in contexts of chronic violence is the exaggerated social expectation from applying hard-line measures. Given the desperation for feeling some sort of relief from insecurity, an increasing number of sectors in more societies are not only adopting aggressive attitudes towards crime but are also supporting a more aggressive state response towards insecurity problems. Hard-line responses are focused on increasing police patrols and attacks on ‘dangerous areas’ and are implemented by targeting ‘suspicious individuals’. In Central America, for example, where the problem of gangs is out of hand, responses have included increasing sentences, reducing the age limit for arrests in order to prosecute younger offenders, and enabling police to arrest people on suspicion of belonging to a gang. In some cases having a tattoo has become a
determining factor for being arrested. Other responses have been urban military operations on areas that are seen as dangerous, like the ones carried out in Colombia and Chiapas, with summary executions as the outcome. These kinds of measures have used high levels of violence in the most vulnerable communities, some of which have included violations of basic rights. The problems with these measures are mainly three: (i) they exacerbate social tensions as a consequence of their reactive and punitive emphasis on certain social groups and on what are seen as ‘problematic communities’, (ii) they deepen the gap between the sort of protection that different sectors of society receive from the state and (iii) they delay the reforms to security provision that could make it more preventive and less reactive and impede dealing with fundamental problems. As the case of Medellin shows, hard-line measures can give the initial impression that the state is tackling the security problems, but they cannot prevent future violence. Rather, a tense calm is created until new groups emerge.

There is lack of credibility in state provision among the population. From a citizen’s perspective, public security is failing, especially in the most violent contexts and where protection from physical attack is needed. However, security is too important to the survival of citizens and communities, and some responses to the crises have emerged. Some of them are led by the forces of the market for protection and the commoditization of security, others are responses led by communities and others are responses led by international donor agencies. In the next section we try explore the main features of these responses and their limitations for solving the problem.

2. Responses to the Crisis in Security Provision

Market led initiatives:

Probably one of the most lucrative businesses, in contexts of violence, is the provision of security. The market for protection is growing and becoming highly competitive. Motivated by economic interests, a growing number of private companies are offering their protection to national and multinational businesses, banks and individuals. The privatization of security is not an exclusive phenomenon of the global South; in the global North, the handover of the preservation of the social order by the State to private companies is also happening. In the European Union, Canada and Austria the number of private guards has already exceeded the number of police officers (Richani, 2002). However, in contexts of chronic violence, leaving security in the hands of the market runs a greater risk. In these contexts, coercion is exerted outside the control of the State, so the creation of a private space for the profitable provision of security creates spaces that can be easily manipulated by powerful coercive actors. In some cases, the State does supervise the process, but not in ways which are democratically accountable or transparent. One example is the experience of Las Convivir created in Colombia. They were private forms of security, supervised and authorized by the state with around 9,633 men. In rural areas they were quickly controlled by powerful elites and narco-elites to serve their interests and to cover more vicious forms of private security already in place, like paramilitary forces. In highly insecure contexts it is very difficult for a weak state to
ensure that criminal actors do not take over or influence very lucrative private businesses related to the provision of security. Also, opening spaces to allow some to profit out of insecurity can undermine even more the state’s capacity to improve public provision. A quick overview of the revenues produced by the private security sector in Colombia demonstrates that almost 150 million dollars are being spent in private security (Richani 2002: 92). This is money that could go to finance better police forces through taxes and to improve the public security sector.

The other problem with the privatization of security is that protection becomes a commodity and even a privilege. This is problematic because security itself is a fundamental right. Security provision is deeply related to the kind of society that is being built. Deciding what is punishable, what is worth protecting, by what means and based on which values cannot be the result of a decision left to the market or private interests. Whoever is capable of providing security in a given society is also entrusted with power and has leverage to impose a specific social order by managing social conflict and human interaction and by deciding what is acceptable or punishable. In Colombia, this means that paramilitary groups, even ones who participated in a demobilization programme, often impose rigid social norms around dress and behaviour codes in the area they control. Similar patterns have been found in other areas of the world where community authority is under de facto paramilitary, militias, drugs lords and other violent actors. It is the poorest communities that are exposed to such rule, those people who cannot pay for the expensive regulated options and are subject to inefficient and corrupt public provision. Increasingly, protection is a commodity, a racket, and the perverse face of security where money is made out of peoples’ daily fears.

Community led initiatives

There are other responses originating in community initiatives. Some of them are based on traditional indigenous values and on a long history of local conflict management systems within communities. Some of these traditional forms of justice and conflict management are challenged by Western values and understandings of the State. Customary law is sometimes in tension with State forms of justice and security, with mutual denials of legitimacy, while in others, customary law and state institutions coexist and customary law has been acknowledged and recognised by the State. These forms of security and justice provision in contexts of complex violence seem to be sometimes the only available forms of security and need to be recognized. They respond to some of the main worries in contexts of chronic violence, such how to create some sort of immediate order and how to respond to the massive demands for justice and security. They also seem to be good at responding to local needs. However, these forms of security sometimes are very rigid and some of them reproduce traditional discriminations against certain groups according to ethnic or gender lines. It is important to explore the values behind them, how responsive they are to minority rights and what kind of relation they can have with the State. In the end, the State is the only actor that can potentially provide security as a public good. This might mean that in some areas it will have to recognize and cooperatively work with customary forms of provision.
In the last few years more attention has been concentrated on other forms of de facto responses emerging from communities. In many cases they are not the result of traditional or customary law, but immediate responses to events that are seen as unacceptable wrongdoings in a community and to which people respond in an extreme fashion. The record of excesses around street justice and lynchings in rural (and sometimes urban) communities in countries like Guatemala, highlights in a dramatic way, the extent of the failure of security and justice provision. This also shows how the sense of abandonment in communities can lead to even more violence.

These de facto community responses are not the result of a consensus over the values that should guide security provision but the perceived need to drastically respond to imminent menaces to what is regarded as the survival and sustainability of the community. In the end, these kinds of responses leave communities vulnerable to manipulation and facilitate their stigmatization by other sectors of society that consider them as savage, primitive and ignorant.

We would like to highlight, however, that in contexts of chronic violence and high levels of insecurity other (more positive) forms of community led responses to violence can emerge. We have witnessed how in the midst of violence people organize themselves and stand up to violence. In countries like Colombia and Guatemala civil society organizations and other social actors have tried to create spaces for action that tend to reduce the domination of violent actors (Pearce 2007b). There are numerous examples of how civil society participation is promoting social change, encouraging people to oppose and resist violent actors, involving social actors in municipal development initiatives and improving women’s capacity to participate and to challenge political and social forms of violence.

These meaningful forms of participation in chronic violence contexts do not immediately or automatically translate into a change in security provision, but affect the way in which state and society interact. They can potentially affect the kind of social agreements and assumptions on what the State should do and protect and, in consequence, on the kind of State that is being constructed. Community and civil society participation in contexts of violence is prompted by the desire to defend fundamental rights and to empower people to act against conditions that are seen as life or livelihood threatening. These responses to violence should not only be listened to, but also regarded as potential triggers of new forms of social and of state-society interaction. We need to question how community action against violence can also be translated into action to improve security. It might be that the first connection between community responses to violence and security provision transformation rests in the fact that civil society organizations can help to build public opinion, to disseminate a sense of rights, to encourage people to resist and challenge the status quo and to affect state formation processes by involving citizens in addressing issues of security, human rights and the rule of law (Pearce 2007b).

International Donor Agency led initiatives
The third kind of responses are the ones *led by donor agencies* through their support to Security Sector Reforms. They have focused on state institutional transformation. Some of the problems with this kind of security initiatives concern the lack of local embeddedness. In some cases, like in Guatemala, these initiatives have been successful in bringing civil society organizations closer to state institutions around the designing of security policy (although in a weak state context such as Guatemala, this does not easily impact on actual public security provision). But this has not meant a better connection between the state and the wider society (Pearce, 2006). In fact, civil society organizations come to be less and less responsive to the needs of local communities especially in rural areas. Security sector reform has also focused on training and adoption of new values by police and military institutions, but less on supporting communities and citizens to gain their own understanding of issues and build their own consensus on the kind of security they need.

None of the three responses discussed totally address the problem. Security provision needs to be based on agreed norms compatible with universal values, equitably provided and should be responsive to local needs. Some community led responses are trying to tackle the issue of lack of effective provision and draw on sensible indigenous values. However, they cannot respond to the amount of complex challenges and problems that create insecurity in this century without the improvement of State provision. To tackle insecurity today it is necessary to develop robust global political commitment, anti-corruption enforcement to prevent mafias from permeating institutions and urgent attention to the socio-economic contexts of insecurity.

### 3. Re-thinking “Security from Below”

We suggest, therefore, that we need to progress beyond these different modes of crisis response, and reaffirm that security be regarded and provided as a *public service!* The idea of re-thinking ‘security from below’ is not a suggestion for the replacement of the State. This is still the only actor that could guarantee that public goods and services are provided as such, and not sold or administered according to the rational choice logic that guides markets. “Security from below” is a call to increase the capacity of people to think about their security and to define collectively the values and norms that should inform state provision. It is a call to find ways to increase accountability of the State, not to foreign investors or economic elites, but to common citizens. It is also an attempt to increase the capacity of communities and local level actors to articulate their demands for a better security provision under democratic principles in which security must be at the heart of all struggles for equitable development and social justice.

In order to re-think security and to develop new practices, academic research on security needs to develop a better understanding of the daily experiences of victims of insecurity and also of police officers working in contexts of violence. The analysis of security provision requires research that is commensurate with the complex reality on the ground. In order to help people to think about the norms and values which should serve as
foundations for public provision of security and to improve their capacity to control it in ways that do not contradict but rather nourish welfare and community wellbeing, it is necessary to get closer to peoples’ everyday lives in violent contexts and to the difficult work of police officers and other State officials in such contexts. While there are many abusive and corrupt officers, our work with the Community Police in Medellin suggested that many are devoted to public and community service but that the prevailing police structures are a disincentive to their endeavour.

We believe that research methodologies involving people in the co-production of knowledge in the field of security could help to increase the possibilities of articulating alternative visions of security that are locally relevant and that can have an impact on public institutions. Action research can also have an impact on society’s capacity, as well as on state willingness to agree on norms and values for a more efficient form of security provision.

Encouraging people to think about their security can enable problem areas to be recognized and addressed: for example, the fact that men, women, old, poor and privileged experience insecurity in different ways, means that provision should be adapted to particular needs. People can also be encouraged to think of which local values or local capacities can inform public security policies; in some cases this will include indigenous ways of conflict management. Mainstream approaches could learn from some of these time-honoured experiences.

State competencies in the provision of security still need to be developed. New challenges have emerged and multiple issues seem to be interrelated. The greater intensity with which insecurity affects people’s lives demands new thinking and new practices. The idea of ‘security from below’ could help state institutions to open channels to communicate with communities and to respond to local needs. This, we believe, can improve the public provision of security. There are examples of how in contexts of violence opening institutional and political spaces for participation encourages civil and community actors to communicate differently with the State and to build better oversight of state institutions. In the area of local development, in Medellin for example, advances have been made with the creation of monitoring mechanisms of the municipal development plan for the city that allow social organizations and the private sector to have a say on the municipal planning process. We believe that the progress that civil society organizations and other social actors have achieved in pushing for more participation and better state institutional accountability at a municipal level could be extended to security issues. Of course, this requires a cooperative attitude from the State and support from political authorities in order to happen successfully. Such was the case in Medellin with the election of independent Mayor Fajardo and the use of the constitutional recognition of participatory planning systems achieved in Colombia in 1991. It is clear that for participation to be meaningful in the realm of security, political and institutional conditions should be favorable.

We hope that the idea of “security from below” can encourage academics, authorities, communities and civil society organizations to think about security in a different way.
We also hope it can help the latter to articulate their needs from the perspective of their lived experiences. They need to participate in a debate about the local and universal values that should inform policing approaches and state responses. However we recognize that this won’t be easy. Some civil society organizations resist participating in debates about security; they see security as the domain of the right and associate it with a conservative political thought that is more interested in preserving social order than in social change. There is also resistance in state institutions concerned with the public provision of security. These attitudes need to be overcome so that people with progressive agendas for social change take seriously the security dimensions of their views and help to strengthen a public provision which will guarantee freedom to challenge the status quo democratically.

Conclusion

We would like to stress the need to recognize that security is something more than eliminating threats to human and social life. It is a public service that should be fairly and effectively provided by the state through mechanisms that guarantee the peaceful management of social conflict and the de-escalation of violence. These mechanisms should comply with three requirements: they should be informed by universal as well as local values and respectful of human rights, they should be agreed by society and responsive to local needs and they should not create more fear or insecurity among populations. ‘Security from below’ has nothing to do with vigilantism or de facto civilian responses to their insecurity.

In contexts of complex urban and rural violence, accountable, effective and inclusive public security which above all does not create more fear in its implementation, is a vital component in enabling the poorest to rebuild their communities and reduce the violence within them. The lack of basic physical security is an impediment to social change and progress in the poorest communities of the global South and the North that affects the lives of all in society. Daily violence and crime affect human interactions, democratic participation and public life. These problems are increasingly affecting neighborhoods and communities, and they are linked to global dynamics as well as national and local problems. In the face of inadequate and inefficient forms of public security provision, new forms of provision will continue to appear, some of them in the form of a lucrative business and not driven by social public interest.

We hope that the development of “security from below” thinking and practice can help to prevent the manipulation of people’s fear and desperation for protection for political or economical purposes. It focuses our attention on the lived experiences of insecurity and how people in these contexts can be enabled to demand the security that is needed, which can only be fully provided by the State, and be able to shape their security in accordance with universal norms.

\[\text{This was the term used in the Colloquium for Global Security Transformation which took place in Sri Lanka in September 2007}\]
By Chronic Violence we refer to contexts in which rates of violent death are at least twice the average for high and low income countries respectively, where these levels are sustained for five years or more and where frequent acts of violence not necessarily resulting in death are recorded across several socialisation spaces, including the household, the neighbourhood, the school, inter community and the nation state public space (including disproportionate, sanctioned and non sanctioned acts of violence attributed to state security forces) (Pearce 2007b).

The Final Report “Human Security Now” published by the Commission on Human Security in 2003 is a good example of how the problems of the global south are reshaping the security agenda. The report identified six critical issues on human security: protecting people caught up in violent conflict, protecting people on the run, especially migrant and displaced populations, protecting people in countries recovering from violent conflict, protecting people from poverty, recognizing the link between health and security and guaranteeing access to basic education and knowledge.

Although there are variations on the level of violence across the region, as the following data shows, the general tendency has been towards the increase of violence rates. The countries with highest homicide rates per 1000.000 inhabitants per year are El Salvador where the number of deaths per-year in the 90’s exceeded the average during the war in the 80’s, Colombia with 4.7, Venezuela with 4.25, and Brazil 3.8.

Young men in particular are affected by a lack of self esteem in worlds where achievement is measured by ability to consume and to exercise power over others (Pearce: 2007b). On gender issues in violence, see Pearce 2007a.

The idea of co-producing knowledge is that it recognizes different kinds of knowledge that can be brought to bear on a problem and engages thinkers and practitioners in a joint endeavour of new knowledge production relevant to context. Different kinds of knowledge range from the academic forms of propositional and analytical knowledge to the experiential knowledge of actors in their contexts.
References


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