

Chapter 6

The Deep Roots of Fear

ABSTRACT

This chapter can be seen as the corollary of the book. The authors summarize the main findings of an ethnography that took five long years in the main bus stations and airport of the country. The four schools of risk perception were placed under the critical lens of scrutiny because of methodological limitations. The current chapter presents a rich empirical research, which though not statistically represented, helps in the expansion of the current understanding of risk perception. The ways risks are conceived in laypeople and experts notably vary. The authors finally found a clear correlation between trauma and risk aversion in professionals while bad working conditions are the preconditions to perceive further risks in laypeople.

INTRODUCTION

In the previous sections we stressed the limitations of applied research in risk perception fields, at least as they were incorporated in the discipline. Starting from the premise that the economic-based paradigm monopolized a great portion of specialized publications, it is important to think alternative approaches. Hence, ethnography proved to be a useful instrument to be used in topics which otherwise remain inexpugnable to the human understanding. To fulfill this gap, this chapter contains my own fieldworks conducted in the most important airports of Argentina and Bus Stations. The results are contrasted to three stories of life proper of three tour travel agents. The goals of this section orient to validate or reject the previous hypothesis derived

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from the conceptual framework. The ethnography took place from 2009 to 2014 totalizing 10 fieldworks in that period. In post 9/11 context, in these years not only the notion of security but also the fear of terrorism traversed different stages and intensities. The attacks in Paris, Brussels and recently in Sri Lanka show that far from being declining, terrorism is today a real danger for the tourism industry in the world. However, in Latin America –and Argentina– lay-people are certainly concerned by other risks such as local crime. Here two important questions surface, is risk a social construe which is adapted to the national context?, or are risks ideological stereotypes created in the global North to be imposed to the global South?

We select, in basis of the volume of passengers, the domestic Airport Jorge Newbery and the International Airport (Ministro Pistarini), as well as the Port of Buenos Aires (Darsena Norte, Buquebus) and different Bus stations. In view of the fact that qualitative methodology does not look samples which are statistically representative, we –following the snowball method– interviewed –more than two hours– to 15 passengers. The interviews took the room in diverse epochs of the year in order to have a diachronic vision of the problem. It is vital to add that there is no previous relation or familiarity with the interviewees and the interviewer, which ensures more credibility in the answers. The results were compared to the self-ethnography and the observation in the above-mentioned sites. The research is a descriptive approach aimed at confronting the obtained results to the main contributions of risk perception discussed in the earlier chapters of this book. For further understanding, we describe in-depth the different sites separating them as following units of analysis: Retiro Bus Station, Domestic Airport Jorge Newberry, and The Port of Buenos Aires (Buquebus).

RETIRO BUS STATION

At a first glimpse, Retiro is the largest Bus Station of the country, totalizing almost 75 gates and over 100 Argentine companies operating in the site. Located in Buenos Aires city, Retiro is 400 meters in length dispatching hundreds of buses to all Argentina, and neighboring countries as Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, Bolivia and Peru. The station is dotted with gift shops, a bar, numerous food concessions, a pharmacy and a Bank of the city of Buenos Aires –to name a few. Our preliminary observations show that Retiro gathers passengers travelling with families and children. The police remind to the passengers all the time they should be careful with the baggage. The

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theft of luggage is very common in Retiro. Travelers belong to middle and low classes (in comparison with the domestic Airport who is reserved for middle and higher classes). It is not surprisingly that people do not drink alcohol beverage –most probably because our participation was through the morning. What is more important, they are edgy and tense using their cell phones all the time. Others prefer to read a book or listening to music. The idea of losing baggage is a key factor in the risk-perception process because it culturally represents a mythical source for survival. In the capitalist system, travels are granted through the articulation of countless electronic devices and forms of payment as credit cards or virtual money. Unlike in ancient times, travelers do not depend on their load but today, the baggage still remains as a symbolic source of power. Many of the consulted interviewees manifested one of their most important fears was losing the baggage or being stolen while travelling. This was followed by car or bus accidents in the route. People, at this bus station, keep an eye on the luggage constantly. It is a priceless good which needs to be protected!

Having said this, Retiro offers a rich variety of commercial premises disposed to entertainment and leisure. However, the most visited ones are cyber and internet café followed by phone boots. The departure opens the doors to higher levels of anxiety which is often reduced to be in contact with relatives and friends. The act of traveling implies considerable efforts to control unpredictable events. By leaving home (secure base) travelers accept the contingency increasing their insecurities and fears. The contact with others reduces the levels of uncertainty but also plays a crucial role in the process of departure. In this respect, from our observation derives the information that lonely travels prefer bars and restaurants to be accompanied by others and television. Rather, families or groups of friends wait for the bus sitting outside of the terminal. The second point of interests appears to be that children demand a countless variety of toys hours upon the departure. While children look to reduce the anxiety through the acquisition of toys, adults look for another type of entertainment as watching television or eating or drinking coffee. Third, those who come to Retiro bus station look on with obvious concern. They are looking for a rapid mean of transport to return home. Here we have two different stages of the journey: the departure and the arrival. Almost all consulted travelers manifested “the possibilities of the accident” is the main risks they perceive just upon departure but this sentiment undermines once the experience is achieved. Although they feel that accidents in the road are the main risks to face, just upon return these sentiments are watered down. Meanwhile, strong campaigns by the “Agencia Nacional de

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Seguridad Vial –National Agency of Protection, and Vial Security- gives plenty of advice, tips and instructions to be protected during the trip. The (ANSV) NAPVS fosters the direct participation of passengers controlling the company and whether the protocols of security are finally followed. At the foot of the brochure, the NAPVS says “if the event can be avoided it is not an accident! The message orients to foster the commitment of lay people denouncing the companies in case of irregularities. This fits with Giddens named as “process of reflexivity” where lay citizens are placed in egalitarian conditions before the risk. The destiny, in this way, remains open to suffer an accident –above all if the company operates in irregular conditions. To construct the sense of ontological security, the citizen should cooperate with the NAPVS, transforming itself as a co-manager of the potential risks. Neither the government nor NAPVS monitors the company, the passenger should do it. Ideologically, passengers do not claim for further security, because the nation-state recedes leaving this right to the citizen. Last but not least, other significant hypothesis tested is the correlation of the purpose of the travel and the risk perception. Those who manifested to enjoy leisure travels were more sensitive to risks –as accidents- than those who should travel moved by business. While the former showed a clear separation between home-travel-destination, emphasizing the narratives of security and protection, the latter preferably focus on the job they should accomplish at the destination. The travel, as well as anxieties around it, occupies a marginal position. Per their viewpoint, the travel is not associated with the destination or the experience but to the maximization of gains in the activity they distinguish.

DOMESTIC AIRPORT JORGE NEWBERY

Jorge Newbery is the domestic airport located in Buenos Aires city, which concentrates almost all domestic flights as well as to neighbours countries. The airport covers almost 140 hectares along the Rio de la Plata River. Per the traffic calendar, in 2013 more than 9 million passengers passed in transit or flew through this airport. Unlike Retiro, the airport’s authorities triplicated last year the security guards and complex surveillance technologies were introduced by National Airport Police Security. Passengers who often buy these services are high or middle-class. In sharp contrast to Retiro, people at this airport are not nervous because of their baggage, but in fact, the rite of departure can be observed in fourth distinguishable facets.

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The first exploratory stage starts when the passengers present directly to the airline check-in desk. The company fixes a “weight allowance” charging them for any excess. The luggage is finally consigned while the company gives passengers of a corresponding ticket which ensures a unique number. At the same time, the customer is located in a specific seat on board. The second stage commences just after the baggage is dispatched and the customer strand in the free shopping mall while awaiting the departure. The airport shows further restaurants and malls while a little chapel is reserved for those who hate flying or has a phobia to flying. In the same way, psychological assistance for those who had phobia is offered. Once the luggage was consigned to the company passengers alleviate the tension while visiting the different luxury malls at the airport. The third stage is characterized by the entrance of the passenger to the zone of embarking where their documents are strictly scrutinized and validated. In this face, travelers should certify their identities while entering in a waiting room. In the fourth final stage, passengers catch the flight towards their destination. Although the dominant fear for those who fly are not the loss of baggage, since there are plenty of insurance companies and liabilities that brought the lost baggage to the hotel or home, the main concern in the consulted interviewees is the airplane crash. John, one of the interviewees (29 years old) asked:

“I am terrified, this is my second time I fly, I feel excited for arriving but at the same time, I am scared to think the airplane crashes. I can’t sleep all the night thinking in this!. (John, Male, 29 years old)

Risk and risk construes vary on culture, time and nation. While in the US and Europe people ponder terrorism and natural disasters as the main threats, in Latin America tourists seem to be concerned by local crime and robbery. The same points repeat as long as the different in situ observations.

THE PORT OF BUENOS AIRES, BUQUEBUS

Buquebus is a ferry company that connects Buenos Aires with different ports in Uruguay. It operates in the Port of Buenos Aires, Darsena Norte. Unlike Retiro and Jorge Newbery, Buquebus handles a little volume of passengers. The original decoration of the terminal is oriented to the sea and the water as the main sources of navigation. In each desk, there are no more than three or four persons. All arrival and departures are shown in a great screen while the commercial activity in marginal in the site. We sat in a bar to drink a coffee when we noted the picture of the Titanic before us. It was comic to believe

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the passengers feel secure after watching before them the image of the tragic transatlantic. Let's remind readers that this mythical ship crashed against an iceberg situating as one of the most terrible disasters in history. This picture seems to symbolize a type of exorcism of the tragedy which once remembered once and once again is controlled. In contrast to Jorge Newbery, there is no psychological assistance to those who needed it. This suggests that in the social imaginary some means of transport are valorized as more secure than others. To some extent, any airport shows pictures of airplane crashes while the sea exhibits a more stable destiny. In the next section, we will transcribe part of the interviews collected in these three different spaces. It is safe to say that each mean of transport activates different fears and perception revolving around the travel. Though much has been written on the correlation between genre and risk perception little is known regarding how men construct their conception of danger. As stated, it is a topic very hard to grasp because men are educated not to make public their emotions, nor their fears. The masculine archetype leads men not only to repress their feelings but also in misunderstanding the fear with another derived sentiment as rage. The transcripts only reflect part of the interview. We, as ethnographers, worked hard to earn interviewees' trust, and this particularly takes time. We look to test the hypothesis those who are frustrated with their work environment are prone to perceive further risks than those who are well-accomplished. In this way, the emergence of fears catalyzes the emotional imbalances suffered in an atmosphere of competence and exploitation. Equally important, risk varies on the means of transport and the moment of the day the traveler departs. Day or night travelers differ in their answers as well as leisure or business travelers.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Paul is a young waiter who works in Rosario Argentina over the last four years. He is happy with his work though he failed to obtain employment as a dependent worker. He loves traveling above all from Buenos Aires to Rosario to relax. Paul has no preferences while traveling though nights are the moments he likes to travel. In this way, the trip is shorter. Watching movies or listening to music are two of his hobbies while traveling. One of his fears is car accidents or suffering an accident on a rainy night. To some extent, Paul has never flown but keeps the hope to do it some later day. He is critical respecting to professional politicians which after the crisis of 2001

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showed inefficiency to struggle against the local crime. Part of the problem speaks us of the greed of politicians and poverty, which is the main factor that leads young people towards delinquency, Paul adds. Rosario has faced a serious social decomposition over the recent years because of the advance of unemployment, as well as the lack of stable jobs. As Paul puts it, local crime and delinquency are two of the main fears of Argentinians today.

Rather, Charles (Posadas Misiones, 19 years old) is a professional tennis player. He goes here and there participating in tournaments. He has flown to the US, Europe and Asia to professional competition. He agrees the training is very comprehensive but has its benefits. In the year, he travels at the least six times but he had little time to visit tourist destinations or attractions. While traveling he is not concerned about accidents or risks, since Charles only is interested in making a good job in the successive games. He opted to travel light and loves to travel with his father. Charles does not contemplate his journeys as a departure of home, but as a continuum where he has to do a job. His fear seems to be the sporting failure. Other interesting case is Norbert (45 years old) who suffered a “panic Attack” while traveling to Mar del Plata, Argentina. He was living there working for a rent-a-car office. Norbert was very sensitive of the 9/11 and the attacks to the World Trade Center, a tragedy happened in 2001. His wife was pregnant waiting for his first son. Norbert not only developed a maniac obsession for travels, but also believed this event would mark “an apocalyptic war”. He was medically assisted and today his attacks of anxieties have been removed. Norbert reflects a study-case where the external events –and not the internal world- is the key factor towards an aversion for travels.

Another alternative study case is Max, (male, Puerto Madryn, 39 years old). He is an associate professor of technology in UTN Universidad Tecnológica Nacional (Technological National University). Though he is happy with his job he would like to work in another company. Wages are lower and per his viewpoint, it is hard to live in Argentina. Like Paul, he does not make many travels in the year but only to visit his girlfriend in Chaco. Max is not concerned about risks nor future accidents but to buy the correct tour. He means “the correct tour” as a good experience affordable at a cheaper price. At home, he was stolen in two times and considers one of the problems of Argentina is “la inseguridad”, (the insecurity before the local crime). He holds a sceptic position and feels insecurity is far from being resolved. The problem lies in the cultural values the young generations are educated. Because of his bad experience, he is reluctant to abandon home in leisure travels. As he observes,

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“This country has a particular idiosyncrasy, unfortunately, the government does not invest in education and now we are facing the consequences. What you see, crime, delinquency results from the lack of cultural values. The culture of hard work has gone forever. Politicians are corrupt or involved in acts of corruption, they do not care to solve the problem of insecurity!.. our fears –for example to delinquency- derives from our lack of respect for the neighbor, or what is worse by the social ties decomposition”

Lastly, we have the cases of Alex (20 years old) and Hector (59 years old) which merit further discussion. Both have contrasting psychological profiles. Hector lives in Buenos Aires city with his three sons. He is B.A in Biochemical Sciences and loves his job. Anyway, he considers that “man is an animal who seeks gain-maximization at the minimal cost”. The great difference in the salaries appears to be one of the things that get Hector angry. Building managers or truck drivers earn further money than a physician who specialized all his life to helping people. Hector is a chronic-traveler and Mar del Plata is always his targeted destination. He hates driving on the nights because at this moment of the day one is exposed to further risks. His major fear is being stolen while driving or suffering an accident. Each journey generates in Hector a state of (extreme) anxiety followed by butterflies in his stomach. Just upon the departure, he revises the baggage three or more times in view of the fact that he shudders to think he has forgotten something. While Hector recognizes holidays are necessary to revitalize himself or escaping from the humdrum routine, he never stops of watching the news or reading newspapers. Hector agrees the rise of thefts, and murders (product of local crime) leads him to imagine the travel as dangerous. The death of their sons is the major panic Hector feels. Finally one might add that he cannot imagine the life without his family.

Alex (20 years old) offers a different diagnosis. He works in a Circus and left the home when 17 years old. He is comfortable in the Circus and resides in Montevideo Uruguay. Alex loves Buenos Aires and its peoples while he says driving is an act of great responsibility, I believe it is better to take a bus or a train. Alex is not concerned by the local crime as well as is an oath to consume news or newspapers. The state and journalism are allies. While the state recedes liberating the public space to the market, the journalism invents threats in order to force the citizens to transform in consumers of what the market offers. People have their own worth beyond their religious affiliation, their nationalities, or even the genre. The ruling elite devotes efforts to create division (among siblings) imposing stereotypes and frightening narratives to

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domesticate the electorship. For Alex, we need to change many things but the change starts from oneself. Lay-people developed a cynic position because they claim the state for further security or anything else but at no cost. Citizens do nothing to change the lifestyle. The climate change is the best example to cite here, he said. People are afraid of an apocalyptic disaster or the future of mankind in the years to come, but doing nothing to alter the current patterns of consumption. Fear, for Alex, cements the power of the status quo.

As an ethnographer, we note all oddities (emulating to be an alien or something) as well as what is obvious for social imaginary. Our understanding of things is culturally determined by complex narratives and rules which are enrooted in the system of domination and social reproduction. What looks normal to us may be pretty different for external sightseers. Anthropology took the lead placing the role of the “Other” as a mirror of what is repressed in our own culture. We start from the premise that journeys are represented as the life, as a liminal rite of passage towards an ultimate destination. Those persons who had suffered a great loss –ie the death of a father or a wife- in a moment of their lives develop a sentiment of guilty or “protective cocoon” which impede the permeation with the environment. As a result, at time of traveling they experience some extreme fears or anxieties as a derivative object to keep the unity of the system (as psychoanalysis amply showed). In such a process, the information and skills as practitioners play an ambiguous role in increasing the level of anxiety. This is what in the present book we term as “*professional paradox*”. Since experts are legally endorsed to find and mitigate risks they access to countless information which is selected following the rules of objectivity. However, when the emotional world arises, the specialized information becomes in an “iron cage” that places the subject in a state of chronic fear.

With this in mind, we consequently adventured to collect three stories of the life of well-renowned members of the tourism industry. Alberto (Albert, 40 years old) worked for more than twenty years for a rent-a-car while Mary-Ann (41 years old) does the same for a travel agency. Finally, Miguel (Michael - 47 years old) occupied different privilege positions in an important Argentine airplane company.

Alberto is 40 years old and lives today in Villa Elisa, the Province of Buenos Aires. Alberto never studied an academic career or attended the university. Alberto only speaks Spanish. Anyway, he entered in the company when 20 years old and occupied important positions and after a long successful career in the company, he was Chief Executive Officer for more than two

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years. Alberto developed different skills and job positions which gave him great experience in the field. In his youth, he came across with a tragedy when his future wife suddenly died because of fulminating cancer recently diagnosed two months ago. Alberto not only started to drink but fell down towards alcoholism. He divorced three times and came back home later. Alberto enjoys his daughter but has developed a phobia to flying. After two years of interpersonal conflict, he resigned to CEO and he was reappointed to other positions. The office was finally ceded to another colleague. The security of his wife and daughter seems to be one of his obsessions though he cheated his wife in countless infidelities. Alberto had successfully stopped drinking but unfortunately his phobia remains. Particularly, he avoids flying and all his trips are in bus or cars. He, so to speak, had middle-tolerance to the uncertainty.

Unlike Alberto, Miguel studied his BA in tourism as well as different masters and courses towards his final doctorate in Management. He has fluency in English which helped in his career as director of the marketing department. When he was 18 years old, we witnessed a tragic accident that cost the life of his father. Though he is not reluctant to travel nor developed any phobia, travels are commonly avoided. At holidays he prefers to be at home or in the home of his parents-in-law. Equally important, Miguel was appointed as director of his company and this entails some business travels. He manifests a strange sentiment of anxiety each time he is notified a new campaign starts. A campaign of marketing implies he had to fly to other destinations for further supervision. Though he does not exhibit phobic symptoms, to put the same in other terms, he hates traveling. In this respect, he was involved in a past of violence and drug addiction which led to a clinic for the recovery of drugs and alcohol addictions. Now he lives in Buenos Aires with his wife and two sons. It is important to say that Miguel is reluctant to speak of his fears, because as he puts it, “los hombres no deben ceder o mostrar vulnerabilidades, debe mantenerse incolumne por el bien de su familia” (men should not be vulnerable because they should protect the family), he shudders to imagine one of his sons dies. Like Alberto, Miguel has been transversally determined by a tragedy affecting his capacity to explore unknown landscapes as well as his little tolerance to uncertainty.

The story of Mary-Anne is pretty different and hence interesting. She is a travel agent who loves organizing tours for German Tourist segments. She is fluency in German but speaks other languages too as French, English, and Japanese. The foreign idioms give her further tolerance to what is

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deterministically different. Speaking a foreign language looks like planning a journey toward a distant destination. You don't know what is there but this is the reason why you like to travel. She knows different European and American cities and dreams to visit China and Japan some later day. She enthusiastically loves travels in any form and nature though she recognizes that her happiness will be complete when she starts a family. Her years as stewardess of an important airplane company led her to postpone her project of being a mother. Unlike Miguel or Albert, Mary Anne lives jointly her parents and never experienced the loss of a loved one. Mary-Anne plans to begin "*el traductorado publico de ingles* (English translation studies) the next year at the University of Buenos Aires.

Mary Anne has a high tolerance to uncertainty. The three described stories show how the above-mentioned hypothesis is confirmed. For some reason, those who had been emotionally affected by the death of a wife or parents feel further insecurities at the time of abandoning home. It reminds that the trauma –far from disappearing- mutates towards some long dormant forms. To some extent, the trauma and the pattern of explorations even in adulthood are inextricably intertwined. This section explored not only new fresh (qualitative) methodologies to study risk perception but contradicted directly the observations done on gender, which suggests that female are more sensitive to risk than males. Per our finding the following ideas can be shared. These observations lead us to think that the demographic school in risk perception rests on shaky foundations. Neither genre nor income or class correlates directly to risk perception. The different means of transport and stations offer different landscapes to the travelers, as well as anxieties. Those who are moved by jobs or business travels feel fewer anxieties than pleasure travels. In the same way, in Argentina, the question of insecurity and delinquency was the main concern of the consulted interviewees. While those interviewees who manifested they are afraid of abandoning home alluded to the possibility of being stolen, no less true is that there is a correlation between the conformity with the working conditions and the fears in travels. Contrariwise, at the time of confronting these results with tour travel agents (who are experts in travels), emotional issues emerge. Those who had suffered great trauma, mainly by the death of a loved one, manifested further reluctance to travel or phobia to flying while Mary Anne exhibited her love for visiting other long-distant nations. Last but not least, the desire of learning or the fluency in foreign languages represents another interesting variable to test in next approaches.