

# **PRIVATIZATION AND RESTRICTION OF THE USE OF PUBLIC SPACE IN LIMA AND ITS INTERRELATION WITH THE FEAR OF CRIME DISCOURSE**

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During the last 3 decades, widespread fear of crime has led to increasing restrictions on access to as well as appropriation of public spaces in Lima. The restriction and privatization of Lima's public spaces has been carried out through several means: enclosure of access to streets, proliferation of residential gated communities, widespread presence of private security agents and video surveillance, and, overall, increasing restrictions to access and use of public spaces.

In turn, the restrictions on the use of existing public spaces have stimulated the spread of private developments, especially shopping malls, areas focused on consumption that replace public spaces as the main social venues for Lima's residents. This has gone along with processes of privatization of public assets, fostered by the neoliberal economic policy agenda which has been dominant in Peru since the 1990s.

Taking into account the described context, the proposed article proposes that the fear of crime discourse has legitimized processes of privatization and segregation of urban space that reflect, in the spatial realm, a political-economic order that advocates the prevalence of private interests over the public sphere.

## **Keywords**

Lima, public space, fear of crime, privatization, neoliberalism

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a widespread perception among Lima's population that crime is the main problem of the city and that it's steadily increasing. This, in turn, has generated demands for drastic measures to contain the perceived crime wave.

Widespread fear of crime has been coincident, over the last 3 decades, with practices which restrict access to and appropriation of public spaces, such as the installation of fences in residential areas, the proliferation of private security guards, restriction of access to urban facilities, and a general intensification of surveillance activities. On the other hand, there has been a simultaneous proliferation of commercial developments in Lima, particularly shopping mall, places focused on consumption that have replaced public spaces as the main social venues for most of Lima's residents.

These processes have taken place within a context of neoliberal economic policies, dominant in Peru since 1990, which have promoted the privatization of public assets. This neoliberal hegemony has legitimized, in the spatial realm, processes of dispossession of urban commons, such as public spaces and its free use, which in turn have maintained and reinforced patterns of high socio-spatial segregation. This dynamic of dispossession has been justified, to a large degree, through fear of crime discourse.

Taking this context into account, this paper seeks to explore the interrelationships between widespread fear of crime in Lima and actions by private and public actors which promote processes of privatization and restriction to access and use of public spaces, having as a background the dominance of market oriented (neoliberal) economic policies. In turn, the paper will also explore how these trends contribute to the reproduction in space of high social inequalities through mechanisms of socio-spatial segregation.

The article will develop, in the first place, the fear of crime discourse and its assimilation in Peru and Lima's context. Subsequently, the article will focus on how this discourse has influenced, over the last few decades, the raising adoption and implementation of repressive crime-control policies. Subsequently, the interrelation of such discourses and practices with the "domestication" of public space encouraged by neoliberal economic policies will be analyzed, suggesting that fear of crime discourses have worked to legitimize mechanisms of dispossession of public spaces as urban commons, reproducing in turn patterns of socio-spatial segregation. In order to illustrate these dispossession dynamic, the paper will introduce the conflict surrounding the uses of the Castilla Park, where local government authorities, arguing "public order" motivations, have severely restricted the uses of the park, while promoting processes of privatization of the same space. Finally, in the Conclusions, the interrelation between the fear of crime discourse, dynamics of dispossession of public spaces and patterns of socio-spatial segregation in Lima will be synthesized.

## **The fear of crime discourse in Lima as a mechanism of public space dispossession**

There is consensus among authors who have researched fear of crime in that it tends to greatly exceed actual levels of victimization (Kessler, 2009).

In that regard, several surveys reveal that while between 25 and 30% of the population of Lima has been victim of a crime (mainly theft and robbery), over 80% state that they may be potential crime victims (INEI, 2018). Therefore, without ignoring that Lima, like most Latin American large cities, currently displays relatively high crime rates, there is a gap between real levels of victimization and crime perceptions<sup>1</sup>. Notwithstanding, surveys have consistently showed that crime is regarded by the majority of Lima's population as the city's main problem<sup>2</sup> (Lima Como Vamos, 2018)

In any case, crime related phenomena in contemporary Lima, along with the public perceptions and political responses to it, would configure a High Crime Society setting, taking into account the conceptualization proposed by Garland (2001). This author, based on the context of criminal policy in the United States, defines as a High Crime Society one which displays the following features:

- High crime rates are perceived as normal.
- Strong emotional commitment to crime-related issues.
- Crime-related issues are politicized and framed in emotional terms.
- Concerns for victims and "law and order" prevail in criminal policy.
- The control of police forces by the State (civil authorities) is perceived as ineffective.
- Thriving market for private security and the adoption of security measures by private parties.
- Awareness of crime is institutionalized in the media and the social imaginary.

Contemporary Peruvian and Lima's social conditions and imaginaries reproduce the main features of this model. Real or perceived, the fears of the population generate a social demand for responses to crime, which have been developed as a kind of "right to security". Such demand is translated according to Pavarini (2009) into two trajectories: on the one hand, the demand for greater criminal repression by the State and, in general, for more repressive criminal policies; and, in parallel, in the search for private solutions to the problem, which tend to privatize urban spaces, as well as security and surveillance tasks.

Among the measures associated to "tough on crime" policies stand out repression to minor offenses and misdemeanors, increase in penalties and imprisonment rates, and targeting youths and certain demographic groups which are deemed more likely to be involved in criminal activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, existing data for recent years actually shows a decrease in Lima's crime rates (INEI, 2018). However, crime rates are perceived by most of the public as either steadily increasing or not diminishing.

<sup>2</sup> In 2017, 75.4 % of Lima's residents regarded high crime rates as Lima's main problem (Lima Como Vamos, 2018).

Likewise, and within the framework of the “broken windows theory” proposed by Wilson & Kelling (1982), the need to reinforce surveillance of public spaces in order to repress “antisocial behaviors” that might promote criminal activity, has been raised. In all these instances, the fear of crime discourse regards crime as a force that must be fought with a higher force –law enforcement–, thus promoting a punitive approach to security issues.

The fear of crime related discourse and policies have been assimilated in Latin America since the 1990s (Bensús, 2013) under a context of neoliberal economic reforms. In the case of Peru, Fear of Crime was assimilated, in addition, at the end of the Internal Armed Conflict which swept the country during the 1980s and early 1990s<sup>3</sup>. This conflict has left a long-lasting legacy in the feelings of insecurity of most of the population which, have in turn led to the adoption of private defensive measures by individuals (such as extensively resorting to private security forces and restricting access to public spaces) and support to highly repressive measures to deal with crime and the risk of it.

The described perception of insecurity has generated, in turn, a “law and order discourse” which has been disseminated by certain politicians and media actors. This discourse regards crime not as a symptom of deeper social problems, but as an isolated force that should just be handed with heavy handed criminal repression<sup>4</sup>. Under this discourse, collective demands for effective responses to crime are re-elaborated as a “right to security”. In this context there have been demands for drastic responses to crime among broad sectors of the public, which have exerted a significant influence over political debates and legislation.



Figure 1. Sensationalistic news coverage of crime in Lima

(Source: RPP TV, 2017)

<sup>3</sup> Which confronted the maoist far left guerrilla Shining Path, and, to a lesser degree, the guevarista Tupar Amaru Movement, against the Peruvian armed forces. The conflict, which started in 1980, came to an end, after the arrest of Shining Path's leader Abimael Guzman in 1992. It caused tenshs of thousands of deaths and served as a justification for Alberto Fujimori's dictatorial rule (1990-2000), under which neoliberal policies in Peru were enacted.

<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it should be noted that this “law and order” discourse seeks to replicate in Peru the responses deployed in the past against the subversive groups (regarded as terrorists) to the field of confronting common crime.

All these factors would be contributing both to a punitive spiral (reflected in the hardening of sentences and the increase in imprisonment) and to the adoption, in the private sphere, of measures that increase surveillance over the access to and use of public spaces.

In this sense, it can be noted that, while the fear of crime discourse translates into demands for repressive responses to crime problems, it has also stimulated an increasing private appropriation of features of social life essentially regarded as collective: public spaces and surveillance. The mechanisms under which these dispossessions have taken place will be described below.

### **Privatization of public spaces and socio-spatial segregation**

Most of Lima displays an almost total absence of public spaces<sup>5</sup>. Although this deficit stems, to a large extent, from Lima's mostly informal and unplanned urbanization, the neoliberal dynamic has reinforced the lack of this urban common, by discouraging the use of certain areas for public uses (promoting instead profit extraction through real estate)<sup>6</sup> and encouraging forms of socialization centered on consumption.

Fear of crime, in turn, has reinforced dynamics of dispossession and privatization of public spaces, functioning as a basis for practices that restrict access to urban spaces. Among these practices, the following ones can be highlighted:

- Proliferation of private security.
- Closing access (during nighttime or even permanently) to parks.
- Urban design in upper income neighborhoods which highly restricts pedestrian access due to lack of sidewalks<sup>7</sup>.
- Building fences around houses, and residential, office and educational complexes
- Restricting access to streets through bars and gates (most times illegally)<sup>8</sup>

An especially notable trend has been the spread of enclosed neighborhoods (both of high and low income residents). In Lima's case, these spatial practices have gone beyond developing enclosed housing complexes (gated communities in a conventional sense), since access to whole neighborhood's has been closed or severely restricted to non-residents through street gates<sup>9</sup>. The widespread presence of private security agents in these enclosed neighborhood further deters the

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<sup>5</sup> According to research carried out by Ludeña et al (2013), by 2010 merely 7% of Lima's built-up area could be regarded as public space.

<sup>6</sup> In that regard, its' very telling notable that, in recent years, several formerly state-owned facilities within Lima (such as ministry offices, prisons and military premises) were sold out to private real estate developers, which turned them into housing, retail and office spaces. None of these previously stated owned premises were turned into public spaces.

<sup>7</sup> This design pattern is mostly visible in high income suburban neighborhoods developed over the last few decades in districts such as Surco and La Molina.

<sup>8</sup> Although metropolitan Ordinance N° 690-MML legalized restricting access to streets through gates and bars under certain circumstances.

<sup>9</sup> Moreover, some of these neighborhoods lack sidewalks, which means that its only possible to access and move around them by car.

appropriation of such urban spaces by non-residents. Although the promoters of these enclosures argue, in order to justify their practices, that they are adopting defensive measures aimed at facing criminal threats, their actions can be conceived, basically, as forms of residential segregation.



**Figure 2.** Gate restricting access to a street in Lima

(Source: *Diario El Comercio*, 2014)

Therefore, fear of crime, along with the exaltation of market over State action in the social sphere and the conceptualization of security as a “private issue” (reinforced by widespread distrust toward police and the judiciary in Peruvian society) have led, in Lima and other Peruvian cities, to a set of practices that have reinforced (and legitimized) in the urban social sphere, the privatization trends that have been taking place in Peru over the last 3 decades of dominance of neoliberal economic policies.

Likewise, these spatial practices would contribute to legitimize and perpetuate prejudices and discriminatory practices carried out by Lima’s middle and upper classes. In this regard, as Caldeira (2007) has pointed out in her study of similar urban dynamics in Sao Paulo, security-justified residential segregation enables the perpetuation of ethnic and class discriminatory behaviors which otherwise face increasing social rejection and have been and are subject to growing legal scrutiny through anti-discrimination legislation<sup>10</sup>.

### **Privatized surveillance**

Along with restrictions on public space use and access, over the last few decades there has been a proliferation of private security personnel in Lima over the last few decades. Widespread private security presence in Lima (along with the restrictions in public spaces use and access which it has reinforced) can be framed in a context of loss of legitimacy of State action which leads to regard

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<sup>10</sup> Anti-discrimination legislation has steadily increased since the 2000s in Peru.

security as a problem best dealt with on the private sphere. This perception, in turn, leads to a set of practices that weaken the State's claim of monopolizing the use of force.

Besides the pervasive presence of security agents in Lima's central and high income urban areas, reference should be made to two displays of the privatization of surveillance in Lima: the 24 x 24 work regime of the police force (which existed from the 1990s until 2015 and allowed private employment of active police officers) and the *Serenazgo* corps (private *vigilantes* hired by municipalities as a para-police force).

Although Peru's National Police Force<sup>11</sup> 24 x 24 regime was phased out in 2015, it is a worth making reference to it, since it evidences how the Peruvian State, acting within a neoliberal economic policy framework, encouraged the privatization of its own security forces.

The 24 x 24 regime, established in the 1990s, required police officers to work one full day and rest the following one. During their days off, most police officers "leased" their services as private security agents (even using their police uniforms while performing these out of duty tasks). After persistent criticism regarding its negative impact over law enforcement<sup>12</sup>, the 24 x 24 regime was phased out in 2015<sup>13</sup>, when the Peruvian State "bought" the agents days off<sup>14</sup>. However, although the 24 x 24 regime is no longer in force (and thus active police officers are not seen any more working part-time as private security agents), it can be stated that this policy had a strong and long-lasting cultural impact in legitimizing the privatization of surveillance activities.



**Figure 3.** Police officer (right of the figure) working part-time as private security agent for a bank in Lima

(Source: *Diario El Comercio*, 2016)

<sup>11</sup> In Peru all police forces are under the jurisdiction of the national government.

<sup>12</sup> It was estimated that, due to the 24 x 24 regime, there were, in any given moment, over 30 thousand less police agents patrolling Lima's streets (López & Masini, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Through Legislative Decree N° 1230, which barred acting police officers from working as private security agents and reinstated a full time work regime within the police. A general increase in the police force wages was passed by the Peruvian State in order to quell opposition from most of police officers, who resented losing an extra source of income.

<sup>14</sup> The days off were "bought" by the State through a general increase on police officers wage.

On the other hand, and also since the 1990s, the *Serenazgos* appeared and spread up in Lima as a form of para-policial surveillance. Officially named “Citizen Security Service”<sup>15</sup> the *Serenazgo* is a corp of private security agents whom are hired by the district municipalities in which Lima’s metropolitan area is subdivided<sup>16</sup>. Formed with the aim of supplementing the police work, *Serenazgos* are mostly devoted to street surveillance and maintaining “public order”.

Although *Serenazgo* has spread to all of Lima’s districts, its presence is especially significant in Lima’s central and/or wealthier districts (such as San Isidro, Miraflores, Surco, La Molina and San Borja). While their effectiveness in dealing with crime is quite debatable<sup>17</sup>, *Serenazgo* corps have been very active on restricting and “disciplining” public space uses<sup>18</sup> and have mostly targeted certain categories of subjects regarded as “bad elements” (Bensús, 2012)<sup>19</sup>.



Figure 4. *Serenazgo* agents patrolling a street on the district of San Isidro

(Source: *Diario El Comercio*, 2016)

The emergence of the *Serenazgo* corps can be understood as an analogous phenomenon (at local-government level) to the massive hiring of security agents by private parties in Lima. In the same way as the latter, Lima’s district level local governments have sought “private” solutions with regard to perceived crime threats. And, beyond its effectiveness to prevent crime or lack thereof, the presence of these municipal *vigilantes*, in a way analogous to the ones deployed in residential gated

<sup>15</sup> Servicio de Seguridad Ciudadana in spanish.

<sup>16</sup> Lima has a metropolitan municipal government which comprises 43 districts, each of one of them with its own district-level social government. District municipalities enjoy a significant degree of autonomy with regard to Lima’s metropolitan municipality.

<sup>17</sup> Among other things because *serenazgo* “agents” cannot practice arrests, which renders them mostly innocuous for actually dangerous criminals.

<sup>18</sup> Focusing on deterring (mostly innocuous) activities such as seating on the park’s floor or practicing sports in them, street consumption of alcohol and even public demonstrations of affection.

<sup>19</sup> Mostly young men coming from lower income neighborhoods and of indigenous or afro-peruvian ethnicity.

neighborhoods, retail spaces, offices and educational facilities, can be regarded as a mean to exercise greater “control” over urban spaces, contributing to restrict their use and access to them.

This dynamic has been stimulated by the division of Lima’s metropolitan areas into several autonomous district municipalities which display high levels of social disparity between them (since most districts tend to cluster with residents of a similar socio-economic status). This has tended to reinforce, at the governance level, patterns of socio-spatial segregation, as district-level local authorities tend to privilege the interests and demands of their own residents over those of the people from the rest of the city. The mentioned policy pattern is reflected into a discourse that sets aside district residents from “outsiders” (Vega Centeno, 2017), especially when the former live in districts of the “formal city” which concentrate middle and upper class residents and the latter come from districts of the “informal city”<sup>20</sup> in which most of Lima’s lower income citizens live. In turn, this opposition between residents and “outsiders” has influenced district local policies which tend to reinforce socio-spatial segregation (Vega Centeno, 2017), along with repression of public space use (Bensús, 2012).

#### **Privatization of public spaces and surveillance as an expression of neoliberal socio-spatial segregation dynamics**

It can be affirmed that the heightened levels of surveillance in the areas of Lima which concentrate upper socioeconomic strata residents (and especially the central urban area) would respond to a socio-spatial strategy by the socially dominant groups in Lima that has been affirmed since the 1990s, in a context of neoliberal reforms and privatization (Zolezzi, 2010, Bensús, 2012, Vega Centeno, 2017).

This strategy has sought to respond to the quantitative prevalence of the informally urbanized areas of Lima (in terms of demographics and built up surface)<sup>21</sup> through the reinforcement of socio-spatial segregation (Vega Centeno, 2017) and placing a high degree of surveillance in the central areas of the “formal city” where most of Lima’s population (in its majority coming from the “informal city”) commutes to access to employment and services (Bensús 2012)<sup>22</sup>. In addition, the conception of security as a private commodity has resulted, in practice, in highly unequal protection against crime<sup>23</sup>, which is reflected on the fact that crime rates of Lima’s areas mostly uninhabited by

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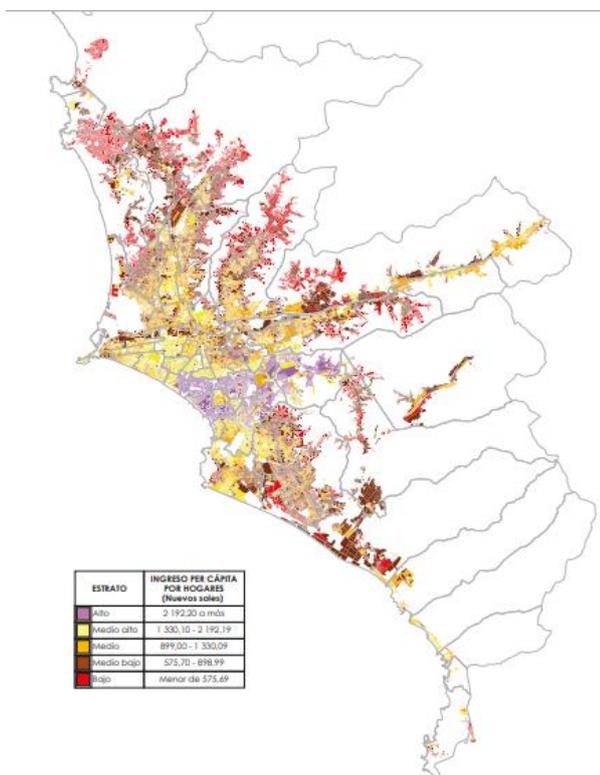
<sup>20</sup> The “informal” city consists, mostly, of the areas of Lima which grew up lacking prior urban planning and through self-built housing from the mid XXth century onwards, and which were mostly populated by immigrants from the Peruvian countryside (Calderón, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Currently, over 60% of Lima’s resident live in districts regarded as belonging to the “informal city”.

<sup>22</sup> Similar patterns of socio-spatial control have been described by Davis (1992) in Los Angeles and by Caldeira (2007) in Sao Paulo.

<sup>23</sup> Lima’s most affluent districts (especially those located on urban central areas) don’t only display a high concentration of private security agents and *serenazgo* corps, but also a significantly greater presence of police forces than the districts with mostly lower income residents.

lower income residents are consistently higher than those with mostly middle and high income residents<sup>24</sup>.



**Map 1.** Block-level household per capita incomes in Lima (purple is higher income and red is lower)

Source: INEI (2016)

In turn, the privatization of urban spaces and surveillance, although justified under a crime prevention rationale, may be more broadly related to trends of privatization of Lima’s urban spaces, which can be understood as the spatial correlate of the neoliberal-related privatizing policies implemented in Peru since 1990. These dynamics have had their spatial correlation in spatial phenomena such as highly unregulated urban renewal which has led to a high densification and verticalization of the pre-existing urban areas in central Lima by real estate developers (a trend which in turn has expressed the dominance of market forces over public planning in urban development); the degradation, restriction or privatization of public spaces; and the proliferation of commercial spaces, which have become the dominant places of socialization for Lima’s population.

<sup>24</sup> In that regard, while in the district of the area designated “central Lima” (which clusters most of the middle and high income residents) rates of victimization were of 22.4% in 2018, they were slightly over 30% in all the other sectors of Lima (which correspond to a large degree to the “informal city”) (INEI, 2018).

En el caso de los distritos más pudientes de Lima (particularmente los ubicados en áreas urbanas centrales), no solamente se observa una alta concentración de agentes de seguridad privados o de cuerpos distritales de “serenazgo”, sino que la presencia policial resulta igualmente significativamente mayor que en los distritos donde residen mayoritariamente personas de estratos populares.



**Figure 5.** Private security agent at Larcomar shopping mall (Miraflores district, Lima).

(Source: *Securitas*, 2017)

Under this dynamic, shopping malls, most of which have been built in Lima during the first two decades of the XXIst century, represent an icon of the spatial logic which has been imposed upon Lima since the neoliberal reforms. They are places governed by a logic of commercial consumption and not of free appropriation of space, whose character of “safe places” (which are in turn intensely surveilled, enclosed and detached from the urban fabric) evokes, in a condensed and neat form, the patterns of “domestication” and restriction to access to public spaces<sup>25</sup>. In turn, these places have become the main leisure spaces for large segments of Lima’s population. In a way, it could be said that, in contemporary Lima, the idea of “public space” has been assimilated, to a large extent, to the shopping mall paradigm<sup>26</sup>.

### **“Public order” discourse and mechanisms of neoliberal dispossession of public space in Lima: the case of Castilla Park**

A recent case that illustrates the dynamics of dispossession analyzed throughout this paper has been taking place in Castilla Park, a public space located in the district of Lince (an area mostly inhabited by middle and upper middle class residents).

In this park, the invocation of public order and crime prevention has been used as a discursive mechanism by Lince’s district local government in order to repress the appropriation of public space by youth “urban tribes”. This repression, in turn, has gone hand in hand with processes of privatization of parts of Castilla Park and promotion of business interests by the same local government.

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<sup>25</sup> In that regard, it’s quite telling that Larcomar shopping mall (one of Lima’s most visited retail spaces) was built taking over an important part of the Alfredo Salazar Park. Larcomar’s construction, which took place from 1995 to 1998 despite significant opposition by residents of Miraflores (a high income district located in central Lima), is a especially notable case of open privatization of public spaces in Lima.

<sup>26</sup> The spread of shopping mall has corresponded to such an extent to the hegemonic urban ideals in Lima, that the opening of them in informally urbanized areas of the city (which tend to display the highest crime rates and lack of public space) has been often been praised, in the official discourse of the 2000s and 2010s as a symbol of “Modernization”. It could further be argued that the existence of these spaces could may be seen as a (highly commodified) “substitute” for the public spaces that most of Lima lacks.

Castilla Park had become an area where groups of youths, mostly from lower income areas of Lima, came to rehearse and perform urban dance routines during the weekends<sup>27</sup>. Approximately from the 2000s, Castilla Park had turned into a metropolitan referent for “urban tribes” related to urban dance. However, this dynamic was abruptly interrupted in 2016, when the district municipality of Lince banned practicing “active recreation” (including dance) within Castilla Park<sup>28</sup>. Since then, agents of the district’s *serenazgo* have exerted an active repression over outdoor activities in the park, while there has been a significant resistance of the groups affected by the dance ban<sup>29</sup>.

The local government’s bias in favor of private interests has been made apparent by the fact that, in recent years, the municipality of Lince has given away parts of Castilla Park surface for the construction of private facilities<sup>30</sup>. On the other hand, in the area that surrounds the park, several apartment complexes have been built, and have been targeted towards upper middle class buyers. Taking this into account, it has been pointed out that the measures taken by the Municipality of Lince against the young dancers who gathered at Castilla Park would stem, actually, from an intent to discourage the appropriation of the area by popular strata persons, in order to make it more appealing for real estate investors, while also encouraging an increasing privatization of public spaces.



**Figure 6.** Street dance performance at Castilla Park

(Source: El Comercio, 2016)

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<sup>27</sup> Dances mostly choreographed songs from Korean pop (K-pop) and hip hop music styles.

<sup>28</sup> The ban was issued through Municipal Ordinance N° 376-MDL.

<sup>29</sup> This resistance has led to legal actions, since an unconstitutionality lawsuit has been filed against Ordinance N° 376-MDL, which bans active recreation and dancing in Castilla Park. There’s a court case currently underway before the Peruvian Constitutional Court, which could strike down the ban.

<sup>30</sup> In May 2015, the municipal council of Lince approved leasing part of the park's surface to for the installation of a small theme park, which includes a circuit of mini cars and another one of boats (the latter built over a pre-existing artificial lagoon). Additionally, in 2016, the municipality authorized establishing a private pool within the park, after dismantling a municipal soccer field



**Figure 7.** Lince's district *Serenazgo* agents intervene to prevent dancing at Castilla Park  
(Source: Defiende El Parque Castilla, 2017)

The conflict surrounding the permissible uses of Castilla Park can be seen as the collision between an increasingly privatizing logic of public space, as well as repressive of its appropriation, generally favored by Lima's local governments, and the claims of social movements that demand a reassessment of the communal character of such public spaces (Vega Centeno, 2006, 2017). In this case it can be noted, in an especially clear way, how the discourse of protection of "order and public tranquility" (stimulated by the fear of crime) which is prevalent in Lima has worked to legitimize actions of dispossession of the urban commons by the public authorities, seeking to discourage the appropriation of public spaces by certain sectors of the population and attract private capital promoting processes of privatization and increasing commodification of the park's space.

## CONCLUSIONS

In synthesis, it can be stated that widespread high crime perceptions in Lima have originated a social demand for security, articulated as a fear of crime discourse, which has promoted and provided legitimacy to process of privatization and restriction over use and access of public spaces. In turn, this trend has been related to a larger economic, political and legal dynamic in Peru signed by the dominance of neoliberal market-oriented policies since the 1990s.

In this context, it is possible to discern patterns in Lima's urban policies signed by repression and "domestication" of the uses of public spaces both in central urban areas and those which concentrate upper income residents. In that regard, the public authorities have acted as limiting agents of the uses of public spaces, sharply restricting the possibilities of their collective spatial appropriation. Simultaneously, there have been several actions taken by private parties which have also restricted access to public spaces, which have been justified through "fear of crime" concerns. These actions have been generally tolerated by public authorities and have gone hand in hand with an increasing privatization of public spaces.

In turn, the policies of “domestication” of public spaces in Lima have followed a clear socio-spatial pattern, since they have been most intensely implemented in districts which are mostly uninhabited by middle and upper classes. These public space “domestication” policies have reflected and exacerbated the intense socio-spatial polarization and socio-economic segregation displayed by Lima. In this context, the higher degree of repression of public space used by local governments of Lima’s districts whose residents predominantly belong to medium and high socio-economic strata would be basically oriented to “social control” of low income people who aren’t neighbors of those districts.

The fear of crime discourse has had a high acceptance in Lima (Zolezzi, 2010, Bensús, 2012), where most people regard high crime as the city’s main problem, while paying little attention to public space related issues. This, in turn, has invested repressive spatial policies with legitimacy. Therefore, restrictions to access and use of public spaces in Lima have not been often met with a strong nor organized resistance. Wide acceptance of the fear of crime discourse would contribute to endorsement or passive acquiescence toward these actions by most of Lima’s citizens, along with the intense socio-spatial segregation which the city displays and the intense penetration of neoliberal practices and discourses in Peruvian society since the 1990s. However, there appears to be an emerging discourse that, invoking the right to the city, aspires to revalue and recover public spaces in the face of privatizing and socially excluding dynamics.

Summing up, it can be argued that fear of crime in Lima has tended to legitimize a set of forms of social control and segregation which are consistent with a neoliberal spatial dynamic that tends to fragment the city-space, promote privatization of urban spaces in order to favor capitalist accumulation and maintain socially segregated spaces for the upper classes. This, in turn, reinforces and perpetuates pre-existing forms of inequality and discrimination displayed by Peruvian society. Therefore, a change in the urban policies of Lima that reverses the dynamics of dispossession described in this paper, will depend, to a significant degree, on a change in the imaginaries and discourses of “fear of crime” that have legitimized privatization dynamics and repression of the use and appropriation of public spaces.

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