| Summary |

'The fear of crime' is "upon everybody's tongue" nowadays (Farrall & Gadd 2004:1). The concept is widely accepted as social problem across the globe (Gray, Jackson & Farrall 2008, Garland 2001) as it is held to impinge '(…) upon the well-being of a large proportion of the population' (Farralll et al. 1997:658). But do we actually have a valid picture of a genuine 'social problem of striking dimensions' (Ditton 1999:83)? Critical voices say we don't. 'The fear of crime' - as we generally know it - is seen by them as '(…) a product of the way it has been researched rather than the way it is' (Farrall et al. 1997:658). And still, 45 years after the start of research, 'surprisingly little can be said conclusively about the fear of crime' (Ditton & Farrall 2000:xxi).

This PhD thesis contributes to a growing body of knowledge - from especially the last fifteen years - that treats 'the fear of crime' as '(…) a complex allocation of interacting feelings, perceptions, emotions, values and judgments on the personal as well as the societal level' (Pleysier 2010:43). One often replicated and paradoxical observation catches the eye: citizens perceive a growing threat of crime to their society, but consequently perceive a low risk that they themselves will fall victim of crime.

Taking a social psychological approach (e.g. see Farrall et al. 2000; Jackson 2008), we will search for suitable explanations for this paradoxical observation in the fear of crime's research tradition. The aim of this thesis is 'to integrate social psychological concepts related to the individual's identity and evaluation of his position in an increasingly complex society, to enhance our understanding of the fear of crime concept' (Pleysier & Cops 2016:3).

We started off with an historical overture, tracking the fear of crime's American footprints back to fifteen years before it was previously held to have emerged (Lee 2001, 2007). The concept clearly started off with a local Republican campaign in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania as early as October 1949. Around fifteen years later,

the concept gained its political momentum at the national level, against the background of a *discursive space* (Hauser 2009) opening up on newly available crime statistics and already existing public unrest about racial tensions. A similar story goes for the concept's history in the United Kingdom.

Our *historical discourse analysis* revealed a strongly aligned history in the Netherlands. The Dutch history of the concept started with words by Willem Drees Jr in the Dutch parliament on October 11th, 1973. After this political initiation, the concept gained momentum very quickly, since it successfully made free-floating worries about social instability tangible for political discussion. The meaning of 'the fear of crime' was highly politically influenced, from the very beginning. 'Fear of crime' was merely rooted in collective sentiments of social worries, rather than individual crime fears.

After this detailed study of the concept's history and initial meaning, we turned to a review of the literature. We collected insights on the etiology of the fear of crime at several layers of psychological reference: the individual, neighbourhood and societal levels. We also added insights related to the sub-concept of situational fear of crime, and explored what is known about citizens' adjusted behaviour. The conclusion drawn from the literature review is that the research tradition, disappointingly, is still 'trapped within an overly restrictive methodological and theoretical framework' (Hale 1996:132).

The second theoretical chapter supplemented this problematic body of knowledge, primarily from a *social psychological* view. First, a more structured and broader exploration of the etiology of 'societal fear of crime' was added. We then delved into the psychological and social psychological dynamics underlying risk perceptions in order to end up with an accumulated and renewed conceptual clarity. This extended theoretical framework laid the foundation for the operationalisation of 'the fear of crime' in the subsequent chapter, accompanied by a tailor-made research design containing '(…) a broad range of techniques that healthily

complement, contrast and challenge one another' (Jackson 2004b:57). Everything was set for the first empirical step.

Thirty highly diverse respondents were interviewed for the qualitative empirical stage of the research for this thesis. The respondents' free associations led to the discovery of five so-called 'mental maps', which strongly resonated with the sub-concept of 'situational fear of crime'. The subsequent sorting of a set of photographs related to fear of crime led to four perspectives. Two could be interpreted as accentuations of 'personal fear of crime', while the other two accentuated 'societal fear of crime'. After sorting the photographs, the respondents were asked semi-structured questions based on the extended theoretical framework.

It became clear that the respondents had a clear sense of control over the risk of crime to themselves, due to a convergence of avoidance behaviour and psychological defense mechanisms. But the respondents' societal fear of crime appeared to be amplified by broader sentiments of societal discontent and political anger. Twelve hypotheses were formulated on the basis of these qualitative findings and the extended theoretical framework.

These hypotheses were tested in the subsequent quantitative empirical stage, which involved samples from three highly different Dutch municipalities: Amsterdam, Hilversum and Zaltbommel. The descriptive statistics of these samples showed that 'general fear of crime' – and especially 'societal fear of crime' – exceeds 'personal fear of crime' on both the cognitive and affective aspects. 'The fear of crime' clearly is a distant problem at the level of Dutch society for the majority of the respondents. And, remarkably, the respondents from Amsterdam feared crime the least although they actually fell victim of crime the most.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) led to rich insights into the etiology of the fear of crime's sub-concepts: elements of a general risk sensitivity were found at the root of all explored sub-concepts of 'the fear of crime'; psychological defense mechanisms strongly

suppress personal fear of crime; neighbourhood fear of crime is mainly the result of social disorganisation; and societal fear of crime is strongly amplified by a more general societal discontent. In addition, structural equation models were found to explain the relatively low personal fear of crime among citizens of Amsterdam – indicating a stronger activation of avoidance behaviour, as a result of assessing crime to be a significant and psychologically nearby threat. Psychological defense mechanisms additionally provided the respondents with a sense of control over their personal risk of crime.

This multi-dimensional study of 'the fear of crime' has shown that citizens are highly motivated to *keep the trouble of crime at a safe distance*. And this explains why 'the fear of crime' has been - and will probably remain to be - a distant and abstract social problem instead of an imminent personal threat, even if it is assessed to be a highly significant risk outside one's own front door.

When citizens experience fear of crime, as such, politicians and other institutions would serve them well by taking seriously this sharpened accentuation of an important public sentiment. Why scare or reassure citizens, if they are already functionally adapted to the risk of crime and if this problem is cognitively neutralised before actually becomes dysfunctional to them? Citizens already keep the trouble of crime at a safe distance, as they probably do with many other "public fears" that governments and institutions nowadays aim to combat. It is time for a more rational focus of policy and practice towards a multitude of "public fears".