

Cătălin GHIȚĂ, and Robert BESHARA, eds. *Fear and Anxiety in the 21st Century: The European Context*. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2015. Print. ISBN: 978-1-84888-346-8, 153 p.

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At first glance, the main concerns this collective volume is dealing with could be formulated by means of several inquiries, as such: are we trapped in a sphere dominated by anxiety? Are we constantly forced to look back or forward in order to get rid of the fear that seems to be an inherent factor of the contemporary world? Are we able to change something? – these are some of the essential questions brought into our attention by the book entitled *Fear and Anxiety in the 21st Century, The European Context and Beyond*. Additionally, it must be clearly stated that the essays included in this volume, rather than being separate units of writing, are a cohesive work depicting some of the major episodes that affected human beings, especially throughout the last century. Thus, by making use of an inter-disciplinary method, scholars coming from distinct fields of thought, such as economics, politics, anthropology or linguistics have managed to correlate their visions and embody a consistent work which shows that not only xenophobia, Islamophobia or Russophobia can alter the state and the relationship between various nations, thus provoking wars of thought or hostilities, but, very frequently, there is an innate tendency of individuals to generate a certain level of disquietude. All these factors maintain the fear and anxiety known as peculiar attributes of the 21st century.

As it is clearly expressed in the introduction, the book itself is divided into 6 parts, each of them containing two studies focused on the most important events we are confronted with, or, in some of the cases, search for solutions that could

improve the actual situation. However, instead of simply pointing out what happens with our present world, the authors try to come up with real-life case studies, that could visibly make us more attentive and increase our interest in what is happening around us.

To begin with, the first section, that is *Xenophobia*, is based on a technique that gradually outlines the major problems still existing in some of the Eastern countries, despite the policy of equality and unity said to characterize the European Union. The conclusive case is that of Romania, a country which has been accepted as part of this organization at the beginning of 2007. As the author mentions, immediately after some of the old restrictions are cancelled (for example, in 2014, when both Romanians and Bulgarians citizens stopped being controlled when entering the United Kingdom), what comes to light is a “rhetoric of fear” (Cherata, Stefania Alina 3). What does this refer to? Well, since such an event leads to many of the old restrictions being abolished, the inhabitants of a powerful country become frightened just at the thought that immigrants could contaminate their space, in order to earn or, worse, steal money.

An accurate and strong example is offered here: the treatment of Romanians living in Italy, as most of them are often taken for Roma and, consequently, a general manner of judging and indicting them is created. With the aim of emphasizing this treatment, Cherata reminds us of the murder of an Italian woman in 2007, by “a Romanian man of Roma origin, who lived in the gypsy camp at Tor di Quinto” (Cherata 5). As the scenario evolves, we can see that the man was offered no chance to prove his innocence, but rather imprisoned without any clear evidences. By making use of a concrete situation, the scholar succeeds to sustain her vision: in an European space, where the leading features should be unity and freedom of expression, paradoxically, pessimism and preconceptions dictate in most of the cases.

What is emphasized in the second essay is the other cause of xenophobic acts, which appears when a person, instead of loving his country, as a patriot would, wants to be sure that he is in charge of the power among other nations (thus becoming a nationalist). Though, I believe that it is partly overstated to say, as Catalin Ghita does, that the most visible fear of otherness is expressed by means of patriotic poetry. Can we diminish the aesthetic criterion, as to postulate only the historical or geographical one? And if we do this, how do we prove our love in a positive manner, as not to fall on the edge of a nationalistic view? I agree that there

is a general tendency of fearing the other, especially when one wants to maintain his power, but it seems to me that this fear is not the crucial factor for a person to be devoted to his people.

We cannot deny that one of the terms that seem to scare or even frighten people nowadays is 'terrorism'. Events such as Charlie Hebdo, plane crashes, September 11, Madrid or London bombings are just examples that come to one's mind and lead to what the next two scholars generically call *Islamophobia*. If it becomes obvious that an aura of fear and anxiety is created and induced to the majority of people, the theory proposed by Lenore Bell is that all these types of hand-made catastrophes are afterwards incorporated into men's minds. This gives birth to several types of activities, such as fitness, adventure races or color-runs, all based on a *guerilla* scenario, in order to constantly prepare citizens for future terrorist attacks. But Bell's vision goes even further, admitting that "when the lines between peace and war are blurred, it becomes vital to be ready for anything at all times" (Bell, Leonor 32). Despite the fact that it might sound a bit as a generalization, this idea is more than clearly emphasized in the next piece of work, entitled *Liminal Moments: Fears and Anxieties between Peace and War*, a survey conducted by Ismee Tames.

Why is Tames' theory an innovative one and what does it imply? First of all, as it is stated by the author himself, the background of it can be found in anthropology, where liminality is the period marking the end of a person's childhood and his consequent transformation into an adult. This change works as a new *configuration* of the self, in the same manner in which the small space or phase between peace and war affects a normal human being. I believe that here is where we can find a new point of view, thoroughly depicted by Tames: in this era, people will never be able to experience a fully relaxation or quietude; the only thing that fluctuates is the level of fear and anxiety existent in a certain society or space, as in the tables and diagrams presented in this study.

We already mentioned that the book in discussion is composed of 6 distinct parts, but, unlike other types of mere articles or essays, they should be seen as interrelated, interconnected in order to allow the readers to gain a general idea and feeling regarding the proposed situations. Following the same pattern, the third section introduces us to the subject of Russophobia. If we are aware of the several conflicts between Russia and Ukraine nowadays, what could surprise us is the reciprocal fear felt by post-soviet countries, as well as by Russia, which at least

technically is supposed to lead that area. This point of view is clearly presented and sustained by Katarzyna Czerewacz-Filipowicz, who is gradually trying to show how anxiety made countries as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and so on feel vulnerable, once they stopped being part of the URSS. Thus, the separation thought to offer independency and freedom of thought for each country, continues to exert a negative feeling there; such the situation, Filipowicz points out that most of these nations choose “to look for help through closer cooperation with Russia”. On the other hand, Russia still wants to function as the most important power among them; if something would turn it down, its influence would become minimal not only there, but internationally.

If until now the scholars’ attention was especially centered on the relationship between a certain entity and the other (that is the representation of alterity), the second part of the book depicts fears and anxieties inherent to several cultures or traditions. Hence, the first chapter of the fourth section examines the most important things that Romanians are afraid of, while the second is an analysis of how a medical problem (here, dyslexia) can have a social and emotional impact on human beings, predominantly on children. We are presently confronted with phobias and scares that seem to have become more acute in a country as Romania, after the fall of communism in 1989. By adopting an objective position, Melitta Szathmary outlines the differences in perception before and after the dictatorial system. What has changed once many interdictions have been abolished? Can we say that we are living in a free society? These are just some of the problems that this essay proposes us to meditate on.

On the other hand, anxiety can appear no matter the degree of liberty or restriction that we are dealing with and in some of the cases, it might be a consequence of a significant disorder or disease. *Anxiety and Dyslexia* considers the impact that an organic malfunction might have on individuals and on their behavior. Despite the fact that the author does not have a clear conclusion, due to the limits imposed by such a complex problem, we are offered a different type of approach, where anxiety appears as an intricate cause one has to fight against, and not merely as the effect of a real event.

The following essays concentrate, as the title of this part suggests, on *Imaginary Aspects of Fears and Anxieties*. This means that we are slowly introduced to facts coming from other fields that those we were used to; now, important attention is paid to mythology, symbolism, rituals or to the different

responses and interpretations that characterize either females or males. As we can see, two Romanian scholars combined their ideas and analyzed the action of one Romanian man, living in a traditional village community, whose gesture of the “desecration of a tomb” (108) in order to make the spirit of a dead man disappear is a factual prove that various superstitions and myths still function in a modern capitalized society. How are these gestures related to fear? Well, as the authors emphasize, “existence in a traditional world is conditioned by fear, that acts as a sort of a cultural code” (Panea, Nicolae and Vlad Preda 111). The interesting aspect of tackling this is the consequent separation between a traditional community and a more emancipated one. Does it really exist or notions such as fear and anxiety dominate both of them, thus reducing the fundamental distinctions said to be real?

Moreover, the belief in what we could generically call non-realistic happenings and facts should make us consider a certain predetermination or stimulus that affects humans in different proportions. Such is the case with the next piece of writing, where Clara Pallejá-Lopez explores the manifestation of fear in literature, or, particularly, in the *gender specific* representation of houses in several books. The method used is not a simplistic one, the interest being assigned both to the literary field and to the gender issue:

“When one considers inherited fear in the case of humans, it appears that not only do humans carry this knowledge in their genes, but also that gender-specific information might be inherited” (Lopez, Clara Pallejá 118).

Interdisciplinarity seems to be present once again, as we were accustomed to throughout this entire collective volume.

The opposition I consider to dominate the final section of the book in discussion is that of estrangement versus engagement. If one does not have a powerful deity to believe in, the void of self appears. But this is not a single-way path: men need an entity to assure them that not everything is in vain but, on the other hand, they also need human beings to make the world function. As the authors suggest, based on historical, psychological or sociological evidences, the main tendency of both men and women is to find a principle, be it abstract or real, to believe in, with the aim of eliminating the inherent fear and the disintegration of self. However, as Izabela Dixon and Magdalena Hodalska conclude, men are more

reluctant to expressing themselves in a free way; hence, *the fear of commitment* towards women, that continues to function in our times.

As I was constantly trying to mention, the complexity of this volume lies upon the treatment of the two central themes here: fear, respectively anxiety. From isolated cases in a small Romanian village, to things happening in the whole Europe, or, furthermore, in the Arabic world, it is shown how any effort of hiding actual dangers is afterwards just a masquerade. The book, rather than a debate on the contemporary world-wide situations, is a factual and applied portrait of what has always persecuted us: the feeling of living in a space that is never dominated by peace or order. Hence, this book gains reliability due to the exploration of various fields, by combining interesting and well-pointed visions of several scholars. More than just a collective volume, it must be seen as a valuable document that depicts Romania, Europe and the entire world in its real state: thanks to this, it gains authenticity and reminds us that the war against fear and anxiety has not finished yet.