Giuseppe De Riso, *Affect and the Performative Dimension of Fear in the Indian English Novel: Tumults of the Imagination* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2018), 115 pp., ISBN: 978-1-5275-0605-3

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Sentiments of fear and submission to power are common factors among ethnic and religious communities which endured the experience of colonization. Drawing on the theoretical framework of performative and affective studies, Giuseppe De Riso's *Affect and the Performative Dimension of Fear in the Indian English Novel: Tumults of the Imagination* brings forward a sharp critical analysis of three literary works dealing with episodes of ethnic violence in the Indian sub-continent to question the role played by fear and similar sentiments in the emergence and development of cultural identity.

The critical reading of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) focuses on the violent consequences of the spreading rumour during the Partition of 1947, when India gained its independence from Britain. More specifically, De Riso discusses the power of rumour to break the mutual trust that Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims had been enjoying for decades by virtue of what could at first sight be considered its weakness: its unverifiability. In Singh's novel, rumour emerges as a potent instrument for the creation of insecurity among ethnic communities.

Indeed, during Partition made-up stories of violence, massacres, and reprisal on ethnic and religious grounds involving Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims were made to spread to serve particular political interests in order to set up a community against the other. Their persuasive force relied on an opaque indeterminacy which fatally blurred the boundary between truth and invention. In fact, such fabrications hijacked feelings of fear for one's own safety to ignite imaginaries of danger and insecurity, creating enemies, even where there weren't any, as well as a persistent and recursive clime of terror demanding acts of indiscriminate vengeance or retaliation.

The second novel discussed in the book is Neel Mukherjee's *The Lives of Others* (2014). The period taken in consideration here are the decades immediately following Partition, a time in which India was undergoing those profound transformations which would supposedly bring it out of its feudal past and into 'modernity'. De Riso's main contention in this chapter is that the restructuring of social relationships and hierarchies happened under the influence of paranoiac feelings which strongly participated in reinforcing intimate contradictions present in Indian social tissue and which is particularly apparent in the contrast between the urban and the rural areas of India.

The novel deals with the Naxalbari rebellion going on in West Bengal in the late 1960s to consider how the feudal structure of exploitation, then rampant in India, thrived on the promises of national modernization. Supratik, the well-educated urban revolutionary at the center of the novel, agrees to go among the peasants living in rural areas upset by their inhuman living conditions and the abuses they

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have been enduring at the hand of landowners and moneylenders and their monopolistic practices. By becoming one of them, by living 'the lives of others', he hopes to improve the life conditions of the oppressed. Yet, in doing so, he soon comes to realize that the problem with India's social inequalities lies not just in uncaring institutions, but also in those very people who, like him, declared to be actively concerned with defending the oppressed. For example, he is forced to acknowledge that even the Communist Party of India, which he represents and which is vocally engaged in protecting the underprivileged, did not actually care about them, but uses the poor only as an excuse to pursue its own interest. In fact, it secretly sustains a repressive apparatus aimed at stifling the Naxalite movement, whose action in defence of the poor seriously threatens its political rise to power. The party, which nurtured stereotypes drawn on a western vision of time, which tended to present those living at the margins of India, at the periphery of urbanization, as backward-looking people hindering Indian development.

De Riso's rigorous analysis deconstructs the ambiguities and contradictions of such a process of 'internal Orientalism', as it appealed to the paranoiac projections of that part of India which had accepted globalization onto exploited farmers and land labourers, whose claims for a more equal distribution of wealth and the preservation of ethnic diversity were seen as a hindrance to the development of the nation. Such playing on fears produced by unequal financial and cultural living conditions made it justifiable the repressive use of corrupted police forces, who exploited the incongruities within the Indian legal system to take violent measures against rebels.

In the third chapter of his volume De Riso offers a keen reflection on Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995), as it deals with the Indian Emergency of 1975-1977 as an event in which biopolitics of bodily control and sexual reproduction contagiously spread sentiments of victimhood and blame among people belonging to different social classes, in a parasitic system in which individuals exploited weaker subjects to secure their own safety or privileges. As De Riso outlined, Emergency is mostly remembered for two crucial points: Family Planning and Beautification of the Environment, in which Indira's son Sanjay played a pivotal role. While this political programme was intended to enhance the condition of the poor, it created a "chain of victimhood" (92) or "structure of exploitation" (97), often symbolised in the novel with the metaphor of the worm, whereby a predatory downward spiral of violence and exploitation ultimately ended up keeping the poor better in check and under control to the benefit of wealthier and more powerful social classes.

For example, police officers tried to ingratiate themselves to political leaders by forcing people to undergo sterilisations on false or dubious charges. Emergency entailed such a "regime of discipline" (95) as outlined during political campaigns, effectively fostered by sentiments of fear. In the novel everyone tries to prevent 'their turn to come' through any kind of compromises. De Riso discusses some key concepts, such as "bodily confinement" (100) and "bodily reduction" (104), which are crucial to understand such dynamics of oppression exerted within Indian social tissue. The first is related to the threat of 'being infected' by the ones belonging to lower classes considered as "carcinogenic"(103) ones. An instance is readily identifiable in Dina's behaviour in regard to Om and Ishvar when she attempts to prevent them sharing kitchen tools with her. Her actions depict the effect

of some widespread cast prejudices that politicians employ by means of manipulation, in their turn, to reinforce the idea of 'supplying' the best solutions for providing society's welfare. The latter is brought forward by practices of sterilization staked by biopolitical work in order to control people's bodies and prevent a nation from "outgrowing itself" (94). Such practices are not equally distributed across social classes, but especially addressed to the weakers, such as the Untouchables. The process of 'reduction' refers not only to the body of the poors and their reproduction but also to the body of the nation itself. It was a specular reduction, put in place also by the effective destruction of Indian slums. In this case another example of 'political collaborators' besides police officers is easily identifiable in the figure of "sanity inspectors" (101) who act by virtue of India beautification, while destroying "anything and anyone" (101) which lie ahead of them. As it can be observed, the two first isolated points of the Emergency programme actually blended and ran in parallel. In such state of affairs, in the novel are also depicted some ambiguous characters, such as the Beggar Master who, for his part, exploits the situation to his own advantage by monitoring almsgiving activities of "maimed people" (102) who return from irrigation camps.

By exploring the significant consequences of Emergency's years for people's conscience and awareness, De Riso shrewdly referred to the concept of the 'chain' in order to showcase both such a burdensome control of social life enacted by political operations and the way in which the terror of being 'reduced' affects people's action and behaviour. Indeed, similarly to what happens between the links of a chain, sentiments of victimhood and blame are sequentially disseminated among people.

The figure of the chain and its structure may also be associated with the salient peculiarity of that political programme, distinguished by its structural circularity. Just as links are perpetually connected to each other, so things and events involved in such an autartich circle are both linked and influenced by the previous ones. Indeed, even the novel's constitution is tangled in a circular loop. This formal feature induces it to perform as "a sinister recursivity" (83), which both follows and anticipates the events in the novel. Inevitably, no way to escape from this "circle" (105) is provided, as it can be seen on the one hand with the final "physical reduction" (104) of Om and Ishvar and on the other hand with the closing scene of Maneck's suicide; the latter can be considered as the 'keeper' of such a loop, because a similar event affects the opening of narration.

Riding some of the bloodiest 'tumults of the imagination' which shook the subcontinent, De Riso's *Affect and the Performative Dimension of Fear in the Indian English Novel* elucidates the pivotal role of fear in influencing cultural beliefs as well as individual or collective behaviour, either through misrepresentations of reality, or by nurturing sentiments of rage and revenge which make violent actions appear as necessary.