

A Molecular Counter- Revolution: Psychic Crisis and Fascism from a Global South Standpoint¹

Vladimir Safatle

Abstract: This article aims to understand the rise of the global far right from the concept of fascism as a molecular counterrevolution. This requires a critical analysis of both the proposed uses of psychological concepts to account for the structural dynamics of fascism and the possible articulation between psychic crisis and fascist social responses. On the other hand, it is a question of privileging a perspective from the global south in the hope that the periphery of capitalism can reveal, in a more evident way, processes that are only now beginning to be felt in the central countries.

Keywords: far right, fascism, authoritarian personality, narcissism, resentment, leftism.

*Social change in the future
will be absolutely inseparable from
a multitude of molecular revolutions
at the level of the economy of desire.*
Felix Guattari

On September 7, 2021, Brazil was the scene of an impressive far-right popular demonstration, which set itself up as a pressure machine against the judiciary and legislative powers. The demonstrations were accompanied by a truckers' strike that threatened to de-supply the country. Rumors of a state of siege circulated, the president of the Federal Supreme Court was forced to ask for explanations about the real intentions of the then president. The following day, the president himself sent a "Declaration to the Nation" in which he pledged to respect the remaining institutions in the country. But at the end of the letter, there was a signature: "God, Fatherland, Family".

The signature was perhaps the most important part of the Declaration. For the first time in Brazilian history, a President of the Republic ended a Declaration to the nation with the motto of integralism, the old Brazilian fascist party. Facts like these were received by public opinion and the press with a certain indifference or as the expression of an anecdote. As if a repressed matrix of our history had emerged in front of us, but that it would be better to throw it back below the zone of perception.

For a long time, talking about Brazilian fascism seemed like some kind of rhetorical license that was more suited to political mouthpieces than analytical texts about the national situation. One wonders how much effort it takes to forget that, in the 1930s, Brazil was the country with the largest fascist party outside Europe. A country that saw the National Integralist Alliance reach 1,200,000 members, that saw its greatest leader, Plínio Salgado, run for president in 1955 and, even after the suicide of Getúlio

Vargas and the end of the Second World War, achieve 8.28% of the valid votes. This same country saw former integralists such as Admiral Augusto Rademaker and Brigadier Márcio de Sousa Melo stage a coup within the 1964 coup d'état and set up a military junta in Brazil at the most violent moment of the military dictatorship, 1969. It's worth remembering that Augusto Rademaker would go on to become vice-president in the Médici government. In other words, there is a line of connection that runs from national fascism to the 1964 military dictatorship and it shouldn't surprise us that the most radical sector of the supporters of that dictatorship, upon returning to the Brazilian government under Jair Bolsonaro's auspices, will gradually end up assuming their original connections.

This enormous presence of a fascist movement among us, with developments beyond the period before the Second World War, must initially be credited to structural factors of state violence. Let's remember how many of the technologies of extermination and segregation in operation in the fascist and Nazi governments of the 1930s were initially developed in colonial administrations. Concentration camps, for example, first appeared in South Africa's colonial wars and in Spanish colonialism in Cuba. Speeches about the need for "government over inferior races" were enunciated by administrators of English colonialism in the Arab world (such as Lord Cromer). European imperialism between 1884 and 1914 was, as Hannah Arendt will say, a "preparatory stage for the catastrophes to come"². Its expansionism linked to surplus capital and the displacement of "surplus populations" from colonizing countries required the transformation of racism and indifference to its "administrative massacres" into a fundamental piece of government. In other words, there is a historically organic relationship between fascism and colonial technologies. This relationship could not fail to mark a country like Brazil, which has served as a global necropolitical laboratory, that is, which even after independence will preserve the colonial logic against its own people, as if it were the case of continuing government practices through an "internal colonialism" against dispossessed sectors of the population.

However, an exercise in intellectual honesty forces us to admit that these explanations are necessary conditions, but not sufficient conditions. They can serve to explain the adherence of the ruling classes to a fascist ideology that appears to be an important part of the defense of their interests. But they are insufficient to explain the impressive popular support for projects of this nature, especially at the present. In the absence of a more complete analysis of the phenomenon, we are usually content with explanations based in some kind of deficit, i.e. those that aim to put popular adherence to fascism down to the shortcomings of the agents, such as "the inability of the masses to act in their own interests", "lack of understanding", "moral deviations", "barbarism", etc. Thus, in recent years, there has been a proliferation of explanations based on moral deficiencies (hate speech, anger at the new so-called

class mobility, “evil”), cognitive deficits (obscurantism, religious blindness, cultural backwardness, fake news) or psychological deficits (resentment, death drive, among many others). Such explanations serve much more to reassure us of our supposed moral and intellectual superiority than to provide precise tools for analysis and action.

It would then be the case to say that, in the face of the current collapse of liberal democracy, we will see both insurrectionary processes and authoritarian counter-revolutionary dynamics in an increasingly resilient way. These two phenomena must be studied in their affirmative dynamics. The defensive systems that authoritarian restoration puts into circulation cannot be put down to moral or cognitive limitations. They must be understood as clear expressions of the effective exhaustion of alternatives, both in the official discourses supporting liberal democracy and in the modes of contestation characteristic of progressive thought. In other words, the authoritarian restoration, what we call a “counter-revolution” because it unifies revolutionary ruptures and restorative preservations of collapsing orders³, points to real exhaustions and contradictions in the historical cycle of liberal democracies. Its catastrophic responses do not hide the precise awareness of problems and the absence of apparently viable alternatives. That’s why we won’t be able to counter it with moral preaching or intellectual disqualifications, but by using our analytical skills to recognize both its indication of real contradictions and the need to redirect the targets of the popular indignation that fascism has imprisoned.

But before we begin, let’s remember that many people have been outraged by the use of the concept of “fascism” in this context, seeing it as a rhetorical strategy with little analytical power⁴. In this respect, let’s remember that it’s not a question of expecting the same characteristics of historical fascism to emerge again in the present⁵. But this doesn’t mean that the analytical use of the term is banned. In the same way, nobody believes that the use of the term “republic” presupposes an absolute identity of predicates between, for example, the Roman republic, the French republic of the 19th century and the Brazilian republic. That doesn’t stop us from operating analytically with the term. There’s no reason why we can’t operate with the same logic when it comes to the uses of the term “fascism”. In this sense, calling what haunts us “fascism” is a way of pointing to real risks and trends that can gradually emerge in the whole of society, especially in countries that have a history of strong fascist movements. They show us how, from a certain point onwards, there can be no neoliberalism without the risks of fascism.

In this article, I would like to insist that the analysis of fascism requires the mobilization of a dual perspective. It must be able to articulate socio-historical analyses and analyses of the libidinal economy. These socio-historical analyses need, in turn, to account for structural causalities, which unfold over long-term historical periods, and contextual

causalities, which concern the system of contemporary facts that trigger fascist responses. Analyses of the libidinal economy, on the other hand, need to account for what we could call “molecular crises” if we want to mobilize a term put into circulation by Deleuze and Guattari. This is a way of insisting that we cannot explain a phenomenon like fascism by appealing only to the description of crises in the macro-structure of classes and their interests. There is always a second crisis that must accompany the first, namely a crisis in the forms of reproduction of the normative dynamics of bodies, desires, sexuality and identifications. It is the conjunction of these two crises that produces something like fascism.

From our background

But let’s start with what we might call the structural factors of Brazilian state violence. In this respect, let’s remember how Brazil was a country created from the implementation of the economic cell of the primary-export slave plantation on American⁶. Before being a settlement colonization, it was a matter of developing, for the first time, a new form of economic order linked to export production and the massive use of slave labour. Let’s remember how the Portuguese empire was the first to engage in the transatlantic slave trade, reaching a position of quasi-monopoly by the middle of the 16th century. 35% of all slaves transported to the Americas went to Brazil. Since the slave-owning latifundia was the basic cell of Brazilian society, and Brazil was the last American country to abolish slavery, it is not strange to think of the country as the greatest experiment in colonial necropolitics in modern history.

In fact, the colonial dynamic is based on an “ontological distinction” that will prove to be extremely resilient, even after the demise of colonialism as a socio-economic form. This distinction is fundamental to the social indifference that characterizes fascism. It consists of the consolidation of a system of sharing between two regimes of subjectivation. One allows subjects to be recognized as “persons”, while the other leads to subjects being determined as “things”⁷. Those subjects who achieve the status of “persons” can be recognized as bearers of rights linked, preferably, to the capacity for protection offered by the state. As one of the consequences, the death of a “person” will be marked by grief, mourning and the social manifestation of loss. They will be the object of narrative and commotion. On the other hand, subjects degraded to the status of “things” (and the structuring degradation occurs within slave relations, although it usually remains even after the formal end of slavery) will be the objects of a death without tears. Their death will be seen as carrying the status of the degradation of objects. It will have no narrative, but will be reduced to the numerical quantification that we normally apply to things. Those who live in countries built on the colonial matrix know how normal this situation is when, even today, they open newspapers and read: “9 dead in the latest police intervention in

Paraisópolis”, “85 dead in the Belém prison riot”. The description usually boils down to numbers with no history.

It is not difficult to understand how this naturalization of the ontological distinction between subjects through the fate of their deaths will be a fundamental device of government. It perpetuates a dynamic of undeclared civil war through which those subjected to the maximum economic spoliation, to the most degraded conditions of work and pay, are paralyzed in their strength of revolt by the generalization of fear in the face of state extermination⁸. It is thus the armed arm of a class struggle in which, among other things, obvious markers of racialization converge. For it is a question of making this ontological distinction pass within social life and its daily structure. Subjects must, at all times, realize how the state acts on the basis of this distinction, how it operates explicitly and in silence.

In this sense, let’s note how this necropolitical dynamic responds, after the demise of explicit colonial relations, to strategies for preserving class interests, in which the state acts towards certain classes as a “protector state”, while acting towards others as a “predator state”⁹. We can find in the naturalization of these matrices of state violence the fertile soil for the development and rapid growth of national fascism. On the one hand, it strengthens the ongoing militarization of society. A society organized by periodic administrative massacres, by police slaughters aimed at reminding sectors of the population of their condition as “killable without tears” needs to justify its violence through the imaginary of constant risk against “good citizens”, it needs to elevate fear to a central political affect. This works as a justification for organizing society in the form of the “right to self-defense” and, ultimately, in the form of armed militias¹⁰. On the other hand, this same logic feeds indifference and social disaffection. It creates a block on any possible emergence of generic solidarity, naturalizing the logic of social predation.

There is another point to be made if we want to understand this social predisposition to fascism within Brazilian society. We know of a certain narrative that sees fascism as a kind of social regression, in the sense of an archaism that emerges as a reaction to the transformations brought about by the processes of modernization. In this view, fascism would appear as a kind of revival of archaic ties to the earth in the face of a cosmopolitan world, like the insistence on organic notions of community and identity against the necessarily plural and multiform march of our liberal societies. It would be the fruit of resentment against the questioning of long-naturalized privileges, as well as the obscurantism that does not allow itself to be overcome by enlightenment and science. In all these cases, fascism appears as a kind of reversal of history. As if we were facing a refusal of modernization.

But we could ask ourselves how incorrect and ideological this understanding and use of notions like “regression” is. For there is a way of approaching the problem that would allow us to be a little more precise.

Far from being a regression to unsurpassed forms of archaism, fascism is the realization of potentialities immanent to progress. Far from being a regression to the confines of barbarism and obscurantism, it is one of the potentialities immanent to enlightenment itself. In other words, it is the expression of the violence and contradictions produced by the very process of capitalist progress. The dialectic of enlightenment must be taken seriously.

In this sense, it would be interesting to think about why, in countries like Brazil, fascism can be associated with “genuine liberals” who always see it as “the lesser evil”. We have to ask ourselves how the topic of progress plays out in countries with a colonial tradition. Since progress is understood as a process of modernization, we must remember that the analysis of any political concept requires an “agonistic” perspective. In other words, we must always ask ourselves: “Against whom are the concepts mobilized?”. So, against whom were progress and modernization mobilized in Brazil? This question allows us to clarify the meaning of the terms and the need for their real consequences.

In Brazil and throughout Latin America, “progress” has always been the weapon aimed at those who represented “archaism”, non-insertion into the productive world of capitalist work and its primary-export logic. “Modernization” was always raised against those who would sink us into a supposed lethargy, a supposed lack of balance and order, because they represented a tacit refusal to accept the dictates of the labor society. The naturalization of the imperatives of the labor society forced us to see societies whose economy is not organized for the extraction of surplus value and the self-valorization of capital as the very expression of a refusal to develop. Thus, modernization always appeared as the justification for imposing the colonial order, as the call not to weep over the ruins of what that order destroyed, not least because it came to “civilize”, to “educate”, to “save”, to “develop”. It’s not hard to see the violent matrix of this process. Above all, it’s not hard to see the symbolic violence, the same violence that is even more brutal and long-lasting than physical violence. Progress should be made without any form of identification with what progress itself destroys.

It’s not strange that this progress prepared fascism. For it demanded the deepest indifference and absence of solidarity towards those who saw no progress in the glorious march of national progress and its logic of continuous primitive accumulation. It demanded the erasure and disappearance of everything that didn’t submit to it. Such modernization is achieved through violent subjugation and the erasure of genocides. If Brazil shows in this way how progress is realized as barbarism, it’s not because we have some kind of historical deficiency. It is because, as part of the logic of capitalist production, we have made explicit what is the condition for European progress in its irreducible extractivism and primitive accumulation. A condition that “under normal conditions” could

be displaced to those lands about which we don't have much information, where we don't really know what's going on. Countries in which the rational principles of Western social modernization "could not be applied properly". In fact, this "inconvenience" is completely convenient and necessary. Without it, "progress" would not be possible anywhere. And if this same fascism returns to Europe from time to time, it's because this logic tends to become widespread. For it has always been one of the figures of progress.

Making the authoritarian nature of neoliberalism explicit

This discussion serves to introduce more adequately the thesis of the contemporary resurgence of fascism in certain specific places in the system of world capitalism. Even if we are dealing with a global process, we need to understand why it is consolidated in certain specific places. These places have their own causalities, even if they are connected to structural processes. The analytical challenge is to understand how global processes produce effects in specific places. Certainly, the analysis of the rise of the extreme right in Italy, India, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, the Philippines and the USA involves the reconstruction of other fields of structural factors.

In this sense, we can say that the specificity of Brazil as a socio-political place is the open, regular and superlative character of its state violence, which is the result of the permanence of social structures typical of colonial capitalism. As I have tried to argue, its roots must be sought in the permanence of the ontological distinction between subjects inherited from slave society and in the brutality of its ever-continuing process of primitive accumulation¹¹. But this is what we could call the "structural condition" for the resurgence of fascism. We also need a set of "contextual conditions" linked to the recent past. In the Brazilian case, this is linked to the exhaustion of the New Republic and the consolidation of the dynamics of a "conservative revolution" linked to the rise of an openly authoritarian neoliberalism between 2016 and 2022.

The exhaustion of the New Republic is a slow process that has marked Brazilian history over the last ten years, and which signifies the exhaustion of a political horizon of coalitions and major alliances. This exhaustion is accelerated by Lulism and its crises, which culminated in 2013 with large demonstrations and a series of strikes. At the base of Lulism is the belief that it would be possible to manage Brazilian capitalism through one-off adjustments that would allow the illusions of the "pact within the state" between businessmen, the financial system, organized sectors of the working class and, especially now, organized sectors of the struggles for recognition. This pact will collapse for the first time due to internal contradictions, due to the inability to achieve the equality it promised, beyond localized adjustments. It will show a limit to "Latin American progressivism" that Brazil will dramatically embody. I have developed this hypothesis in other works¹².

Lulism will return in 2023 as a last resort against a proto-fascist government that very nearly didn't get re-elected. With regard to this return, I would simply like to point out that it does not in itself call into question the thesis of the end of Lulism. History knows several processes that return after their end, creating very specific phenomena of repetition and political and social paralysis. But the current situation is too undefined for us to launch peremptory hypotheses about this return of the Brazilian left and its unfolding.

Here I would like to insist on another point, namely how the retraction of the horizon of transformation proper to the Brazilian left¹³ leads, among other things, to the consolidation of authoritarian neoliberalism as a "revolutionary" alternative to the closure of the historical cycle of national pacts and its disappointing balance. The figure of authoritarian neoliberalism with a fascist association appears as an alternative of rupture with a strong capacity for popular and insurrectionary adherence. This adherence is explained by the fact that, within the political clash, it provides a paradoxical discourse of strengthening autonomy and freedom as a way of achieving emancipation. This is the "revolutionary" character of the process.

In this sense, let's look at how the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism promises to transform Brazil into a "freer" country. In other words, we won't understand anything about this phenomenon of authoritarian restoration if we don't understand how "freedom" appears here as a fundamental normative horizon. This conception of freedom is mainly expressed through notions such as self-ownership and entrepreneurship¹⁴. It is, in its own way, a response to a real perception, namely that there is no more room in capitalism for macro-structures of protection. As Wolfgang Streeck rightly points out, contemporary capitalism, with its combination of continuous low growth, chronic indebtedness and exploding inequality, has entered an irreversible process of decomposition, as it is unable to guarantee any form of systemic stability, without there being any other consolidated alternative to replace it for the time being¹⁵. Attempts to reissue the social pacts that enabled the advent of the welfare state have proved unsustainable because the working class has no longer been able to accumulate the strength to demand compensation against the irreversible process of strengthening the dynamics of primitive accumulation and concentration of income. What's more, the very notion of the "welfare state" hid the "malaise" that it needed to preserve in order to survive. It's enough to see how the European versions of the *welfare state* are creations that are sustained by the preservation of colonial dynamics through the plundering of masses of immigrants without rights or in a precarious situation of rights.

Bolsonaro's response is the standard response of neoliberalism: it's no longer about trying to create macro-structures of protection by pushing the economy away from the principles of free competition and the

capitalist free market. It's about extending individuals' "capacity to choose" by allowing them to fight, through their supposed merits and decisions, for their own survival. In other words, it's about strengthening the illusion of individuals as forums for decisions and deliberations, which also implies putting the costs of impasses and failures on their backs. Following this logic, school would pass to individuals (through home schooling), health would pass to individuals, security would pass to individuals (who can and should carry guns). In the same way, all obligations of solidarity with the most vulnerable groups are gradually annulled, as they are tacitly understood as obstacles to the individual struggle for survival.

This dissolution of social obligations of solidarity appears as a response to the social fear produced by the precariousness resulting from globalization, the loss of the political sphere of intervention in the economy and the type of social alliance that a certain "progressive neoliberalism", as Nancy Fraser will say, has been able to put into circulation¹⁶. Fraser's thesis points to a real problem for the global left. Unable to provide a credible alternative for the creation of effectively universalist macro-structures of protection, moving into a field in which its economic policies operate on the basis of accepting the principles of "respect for contracts", "fiscal balance", "entrepreneurship" typical of its opponents, unable to even put into circulation themes that have characterized the struggles of the left for more than a century (self-management of the working class, radical limitation of wage inequalities, radical extension of free services, direct democracy, etc.), so-called progressive governments have been able to put into circulation themes that have characterized the struggles of the left for more than a century.), so-called progressive governments were faced with a twofold operation: the preservation of the gains and economic logics of the most financialized sectors of the economy and the compensatory development of recognition policies towards historically dispossessed social groups. It was the effective work of the left to use these recognition policies as the only sector in which it had substantial differences to show. This contradictory movement ended up producing a certain form of "alliance" described by Fraser as follows:

an alliance between the main currents of the new social movements (feminism, anti-racism, multiculturalism and LGBTQ rights) and service-based, high-potential 'symbolic' business sectors (Wall Street, Silicon Valley and Hollywood). In this alliance, progressive forces are effectively united with the forces of cognitive capitalism, especially financialization. However unintentionally, the former lend their charisma to the latter. Ideals such as diversity and empowerment, which in principle could serve different ends, now shine through policies that have devastated manufacturing and the livelihoods of that middle class that would once have been open to those fighting for such ideals¹⁷.

This alliance ends up serving the fascist discourse of the need for a country that is more popular and no longer subjugated by its cultural elite and its ways of life. It allows for a new inscription of the political division between the elite and the people. It will not be the division between the dispossessed masses and the national rentier elite, between the rural working class and agribusiness. Rather, the division will be between the people and the country's cultural elite: those who would allegedly live off the benefits of the state, who would be ensconced in universities, who would dream of imposing their ways of life, their successful "globalism" and their conceptions of sexuality on the people. This was already a constituent strategy of integralism and consisted of affirming that the true elite was not the one that held economic capital, but the one that held cultural hegemony and cultural patterns "foreign to our people". This strategy was also present in German Nazism, where two of the major topics of mobilization were the risk of "cultural Bolshevism" and "sexual Bolshevism". This strategy returns, but now in a potential alliance with economic capital itself in its new "monopoly with a diversity committee" version.

If we accept the reality of such a contradiction, we should limit the analytical scope of the discourse of fascism being fueled by the resentment of former holders of privilege against the social ascension of new groups. There is a basic sociological problem that precedes this psychological description, namely the fact that these former holders of privilege are now, in the majority, economically vulnerable, precarious, dispossessed groups with no horizon of protection. The social rise of new groups is seen by them as threatening, mainly due to the lack of effective universalist policies to protect and strengthen the various sectors of the working class.

In this way, the contemporary combination of neoliberalism and fascism provides a dramatically terrible response to a real problem. It uses the discourse of freedom as self-ownership, as the strengthening of individual decision-making forums, to disengage the state from any form of compensatory policy, thus creating the illusion of a more "equitable" situation. Since freedom is the property I have of myself, then the second step is almost natural: owners don't just enjoy their property, they undertake, they produce more property. This is helped by the fact that even on the left, discourses linked to "entrepreneurship" as a form of social emancipation have circulated and continue to circulate, whether in the form of "peripheral entrepreneurship", "entrepreneurship of the multitude", among others. This consolidates the social perception that emancipation only has one path, namely in the field of competition. And if this is indeed the case, we can expect nothing different from a Hobbesian struggle in which sovereign power is, this time, embodied by Capital.

Against this, it would be necessary to insist that "freedom" is not a predicate that we apply to "individuals". There is simply a categorical mistake here. There are no free individuals because "freedom" is a

predicate that we can only apply to social bodies. Free individuals cannot exist in non-free societies, not least because freedom is not a disposition of conduct, nor a structure of thought, but a system of social actions and practices. Only in a free society is such a system of actions possible. The notion of freedom based on entrepreneurship and free enterprise is simply a fraud. Entrepreneurship is not a form of freedom, but of servitude. It is the violence of reducing all social relations to relations of competition and the understanding of all experience as capital that is “invested” in.

The limits of the authoritarian personality concept

This way of approaching the problem serves to deflate the psychological concepts that have come to colonize the political discussion about the resurgence of fascism. This deflation is necessary not in order to abandon the libidinal dimension of the problem, but to define its structure more clearly. These concepts are often linked to properly moral criticisms of fascism. They should be avoided because they presuppose that their enunciators are in a supposedly privileged and assured moral position or that they speak from a place of guaranteed psychological maturity.

One of these concepts, which initially seemed to be one of the most useful, was the “authoritarian personality”¹⁸. The idea was to defend a form of correlation between authoritarianism and a “psychological type”, a certain form of personality whose etiology could be psychoanalytically described. In a similar way to clinical categories such as obsessive neurosis, hysteria, paranoia, the authoritarian personality could be identified, singularized and be the object of prophylactic forms of social intervention.

This notion of an authoritarian personality has a certain genealogy which, in its own way, goes back to the social criticism of the first generation of the Frankfurt School and its quest to analyze the libidinal structures of fascism and anti-Semitism. Since Erich Fromm’s pioneering studies in the early 1930s on the adherence of the German working class to Nazism, based on an analysis of the links between the “emotional impulses of the individual and his political opinions”¹⁹ which could be based on a supposed “sado-masochistic character” of the subjects, the Frankfurtians took upon themselves the task of using the psychoanalytical and psychological framework to understand the forms of social authoritarianism. In this spirit, we will find debates on the structure of the authoritarian family in its relation to fascism in *Studies on Authority and the Family*, edited by Max Horkheimer in 1936, and from then on we will see a series of studies and texts that will culminate in *Studies on the Authoritarian Personality*, by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson and Nevitt Sanford, and in the series of books, edited by Horkheimer and Samuel Flowerman, entitled *Studies on Prejudice*.

We can understand these works as the necessary expression of the complexification of a theory of revolution. Because fidelity to the process of revolutionary transformation does not only require a theory of

the possibility of the emergence of revolutionary subjects. Rather, it also requires an understanding of the process of transforming revolutionary tendencies into counter-revolutionary subjectivities. In other words, as Marx showed us in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, a theory of revolutionary uprising is inseparable from a theory of the possibilities open to counter-revolution. To this end, these Frankfortian studies sought to mobilize the contradictions immanent to the process of socialization and individuation in modern societies. In this sense, they opened up a fruitful avenue by insisting on the psychic predisposition to a fascist-style reaction. On the other hand, the discussion about the existence of an authoritarian personality allowed us to talk about fascism without having to link it to the existence of a fascist state, since we are talking about a potentiality inscribed in subjectivities. It is the assumption of the existence of an authoritarian personality that leads Adorno to state: “the survival of National Socialism in democracy is potentially more threatening than the survival of fascist tendencies against democracy.”²⁰.

It should be noted that the possibility of the existence of an authoritarian personality was not exclusive to the Frankfortians. In 1943, influenced by Fromm, Abraham Maslow wrote about “the structure of the authoritarian character”²¹ with the aim of identifying who would be the “friends” of democracy and the “enemies” to fight. In 1933, following a path all of his own, Wilhelm Reich had described fascism from a psychoanalytic study on “the authoritarian structuring of man” in which the notion of “character” was fundamental. Regarding the notion of character, Reich recalled that the ego’s defense mechanisms, as well as its character traits that make up the core of the psychological personality, are constituted in the same way as symptoms. That’s why:

The form of the ego’s reactions, which differs from one character to another even when the contents of the experiences are similar, can be traced back to childhood experiences, in the same way as the content of symptoms and fantasies²².

In the analysis, we are dealing with resistances which are manifestations of character traits or “a person’s way of existing”²³ which is expressed in their system of reactions and regularities. When analyzing fascism from the point of view of character structure, Reich mobilized the relationship between the social archeology of sexual repressions, the constitution of the authoritarian family and the production of psychic personality. This reminds us that Reich, along with Fromm, was one of the first to insist that there is a fascist personality, that fascism could describe a form of personality.

But let’s note an important difference between the projects of Reich and the Frankfortians. Take, for example, a statement by Max Horkheimer in the preface to *Studies in Prejudice*:

Our aim is not just to describe prejudice, but to explain it in order to help eradicate it. That is the challenge we would like to meet. Eradication means re-education, scientifically planned from a scientific understanding of how we got there. And, in a strict sense, education is, by its nature, something personal and psychological. For example, once we understand how the experience of war can, in certain cases, strengthen personality traits predisposed to group hatred, educational remedies follow logically. In the same way, exposing the psychological tricks in the agitators' arsenal can help immunize their potential victims²⁴.

Horkheimer places the description of the authoritarian personality within a reeducational and prophylactic project. It would be possible, through education and enlightenment, to prevent the prevalence of certain personality traits, to immunize victims from the effect of agitators. This presupposes a type of action that does not fail to bring us back to certain current demands, namely the belief that the mobilization of shared principles of current democratic life could provide the basis for a prophylaxis against authoritarianism. As if today's society were in a position to eliminate the "authoritarian deviations" that seem to come from somewhere outside. Reich knew, at least, that action on the structures of the authoritarian character was not possible without a global transformation in the hegemonic modes of socialization. This would amount to a real revolution, in this case, a "sexual revolution" that would call into question our entire socio-historical model of repressive socialization of drives.

This, shall we say, pedagogical illusion based on the emancipatory potential of enlightenment will be confronted, within the work of the Frankfurtians themselves, with a more structural and complex thesis, namely that there is an authoritarianism in the very conception of personality²⁵. This means that the personality, as a form of organization historically constituted in the West, is in itself a rigid, static structure, for which there is no unity and coherence of conduct without segregation, there is no identity without the violent denial of its relationship to difference. This thesis is found mainly in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in its chapter on anti-Semitism. In it, we find the authors mobilizing a genetic understanding on the modern Self in order to expose its naturally authoritarian character, its necessary denial of mimetic affinities with the non-Self, exploring to this end the Freudian understanding of the proximity between the dynamics of the constitution of the Self and the structures of paranoia. This understanding will be developed extensively by Jacques Lacan when he insists that the personality as such has a paranoid structure. Its cognitive structure is projective, its identity and unitary organization is narcissistic and defensive, its dependence on the other is constantly denied and unknown.

If we take the *Studies on the Authoritarian Personality*, we will find an operational definition of personality as “predisposition to response”, as a “disposition to behave”, “susceptibility” linked to a “structure” which, although always modifiable, is usually very resistant to fundamental changes. Hence statements such as:

Personality remains *behind* the behavior and *within* the individual. Personality forces are not responses, but *predisposition for response*; whether or not a readiness will produce an explicit expression depends not only on the situation of the moment, but on what other predispositions stand in opposition to it²⁶.

The idea was to identify who would be prone to fascist propaganda and discourse. Why are certain individuals more likely to respond in a fascist way to social conditions of crisis? However, perhaps such an objective is simply unattainable because it has to mobilize such a large number of variables to describe the shift to authoritarianism, many of them not exactly linked to a personality structure, that it becomes a chimera. On the other hand, the notion of “predisposition”, of “susceptibility” is epistemologically fragile because we cannot precisely define the external conditions that, if present, will necessarily actualize a possibility. That would be to fall into a necessitarian perspective, but now a kind of “psychological necessitarianism”.

As if that weren’t enough, it’s not clear that the authoritarianism of the agents depends on a continuously recurring pattern. We know of changes in structure and changes in behavior based on changes in the social situation. We know of “regional authoritarianisms”, i.e. authoritarian behavior only in specific situations. On the other hand, there is no guarantee that “non-authoritarian personalities” cannot develop authoritarian behavior in certain contexts and in front of certain groups. Let’s note, for example, how the example given by Adorno of a “genuine liberal” is someone who sees no problem in saying: “I could even marry a black man if he had white enough skin”²⁷.

However, the *Studies* may end up fulfilling another function. At one point, the text recognizes that personality patterns that have been dismissed as ‘pathological’ may turn out to be “nothing more than exaggerations of what was almost universal beneath the surface of that society”²⁸. This statement, which is closer to what we can derive from the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, if taken emphatically, brings us face to face with what may be the true contribution of a discussion of this nature. The idea of a pathological formation as an exaggeration of general traits is the exact way in which Freud describes the relationship between normal and pathological. He even uses the metaphor of the pathological as a broken crystal that reveals the grooves always present in the crystal. But being faithful to such an understanding could lead us to question the sense of singularizing a

“type” of personality that would define general patterns of authoritarian behaviour. What we might call an “authoritarian personality” is, in fact, an explanation of the normal balance of socialization and individuation processes in our society. Which is an even more significant thesis.

Let’s take one of several possible points in this discussion. If we admit that one of the main socialization systems in contemporary capitalist societies is the culture industry, then it shouldn’t surprise us to see how paranoid and complotist narratives, structures of stereotyping and functionalization, are the natural element of its products, they are the normal narratives of the discourses that make it up²⁹. In the same way, the logic of personality as a “typology” is an objective fact within such socialization systems.

If this is the case, we must draw the consequences of living in an era of the collapse of alternative political grammars, that is, an era in which political communication is organized based on the general dictates and modes of determination of the most fetishized sectors of the culture industry. In such an era, even the left communicates without questioning the modes of visibility and organization of discourses specific to the culture industry. We are in the era of the “instagram left” and this has consequences. One of them is the generalization of personality structures that are organized based on the discourse characteristics of the culture industry. Stereotyped, functional personalities that act out paranoid logics. And it’s no coincidence that some of the main leaders of the far right have come from entertainment (Trump, Berlusconi). Bolsonaro, for example, became nationally known thanks to his participation in television programs of ... humor. Humor is a central element here, because it’s a question of operating identification with such leaders in a “cynical” way, in the sense of identifications that are “mere appearances” and which, in this way, allow the most violent discourses to circulate, to produce effects, without the agents describing themselves as actually involved. This is essential in order to sustain the violent structures of the personality without demanding the price of an ethic of conviction³⁰. All this shows us how the culture industry is the natural language of the far right and perhaps it is no coincidence that it is growing again at the very moment when cultural criticism no longer seems to make sense to hegemonic sectors of the left.

In this sense, the real fact worthy of research would not be the existence of an “authoritarian personality”, but of subjectivities with a strong critical potential in relation to their own authoritarianism. In other words, the starting point of the *Studies on the Authoritarian Personality* is, in a way, “upside down” if we accept various elaborations by the Frankfurtians themselves. Rather than *specifying* a certain type of personality, it would be a case of *generalizing* authoritarian traits to any and all personalities. And it would also be a case of describing the socio-historical coordinates that produce the conditions for the expression of

the inherent authoritarianism of the personality in fascism, in order to arrive at the effectively specific case, namely that of a subject sensitive to the authoritarianism of his/her own personality.

This shows us how personality cannot serve as a normative horizon for defining normal maturation structures. Effective maturation is linked to forms of integration of what was expelled from the personality so that it could be constituted as a unity and structure of synthesis. There is a dialectic within this process in which the individuation promised by the constitution of the personality only really begins where it ends. Because the ability to integrate what has been expelled from the dynamics of unification with a view to the constitution of the personality is the fundamental mark of a non-defensive realization of identity, of the possibility of a non-violent psychic synthesis that is the beginning of other forms of subjectivity. In this sense, we could say that it would only make sense to speak of “authoritarian personality” to describe those situations in which the subject’s conflict in relation to their own personality is no longer possible.

If we accept this point, it would be the case to say that, far from being some form of explosion of irrationality and social regression, fascism was the realization of a psychological structure that had been born as if it were the subjective condition for the implementation of normative demands of social freedom and maturation, but which had necessarily been inverted into its opposite. A chapter in the history of the inversions of reason into a principle of social domination³¹.

A psychic crisis

And here I would like to end by emphasizing how fascism operates under the sign of a double crisis. I spoke earlier about the socio-economic crisis to which authoritarian neoliberalism is a possible response. It unfolds at, let’s say, a macro-structural level. However, for us to have fascism, it is necessary for this crisis to be coupled with another, namely a crisis that unfolds at the micro-structural level. Fascism depends on a concomitant double crisis. In the case of this second crisis, we can talk about “micro-structural decompositions”, i.e. those that occur at the level of social norms that sought to manage sexuality, bodies, reproductive relations within the family, among others.

These decompositions at the micro-structural level, in other words, these impossibilities of the material reproduction of hegemonic forms of life at the micro-structural level, were thematized by the Frankfurtians in the early 1930s through the topic of the “weakening of the Self”, the “decline of paternal authority” and the consolidation of the “authoritarian family” as a desperate reaction to the collapse of patriarchy. They make up something we could call a “psychic crisis”. This crisis comes from the collapse linked to the historical impossibility of sustaining the illusion that the identity, synthetic unity and integrity of the modern Self was not

the result of the internalization of a “system of scars” and segregations. Hence the impossibility of sustaining the production of such an identity through the traditional strategies of normalizing paternal identifications.

The historical causes for the exhaustion of the belief in the organicity of the unity of the Self and its identity, which would provoke what we call here a “psychic crisis”, are various. The pressure for real equality coming from the communist movements since the Soviet Revolution has helped to call into question the segregationist and colonial foundations of modern individuality. “Sexual Bolshevism” (a wartime term coined by the Nazis) warned the German family against the supposedly destructive effects of gender equality and the communist disenchantment of the family. The decomposition of traditional orders, in a key that brings us back to the “suffering of indeterminacy” described by Durkheim, should also be remembered³². The rise of off-center expression in the field of aesthetics should also not be overlooked, especially for a regime that took “Entartete Kunst” so seriously. In other words, this is a multifactorial phenomenon.

A transformative strategy would consist of assuming this decomposition and taking it as the driving force behind the emergence of forms of subjectivity to come. But another possible strategy involves internalizing a defense mechanism against this weakening. This will consist of developing narcissistic identifications, defending the shaken social positions of authority, defending the irreducibility of “individuals and families” on the basis of a narcissistic logic. The fragility of the Self will be compensated for by specular identification with a narcissistic, rigid image of oneself, elevated to the position of authority. An authority that is both virile and caricatured, phallic and cynical, a mixture of brutality and self-delusion, since it would be impossible to annul the historical awareness of its demise. Thus, we will have what Adorno called: “the enlargement of the subject’s own personality, a collective projection of himself, rather than the image of a father whose role during the last phase of the subject’s childhood may well have decayed in today’s society.”³³.

Adorno explores this trait to talk about the structure of identification with fascist leaders. The fascist leader is not constituted from the image of the father, but from the narcissistic image of the subject. For this reason, he mobilizes the concept of the ‘little big man’: “a person who suggests, at the same time, omnipotence and the idea that he is just another of the people, a simple, rude and vigorous American, uninfluenced by material or spiritual wealth”³⁴. Someone who is not constituted from the image of a normative ideal, but who appears on the scene of omnipotence with the same clothes as us, with the same inabilities, who supposedly speaks “like us”, with the same rages and “outbursts”. Hence the well-known image, provided by Adorno, of Hitler as a mixture of King Kong and a suburban barber.

If we accept this approach, then we should ask ourselves whether it is possible to defend the existence of a psychic crisis that is characteristic

of our time. This means describing a set of processes that place the psychic structure at a point of necessary transformation or violent defense. In this sense, let's note how the same movement to reconstruct the forms of circulation of bodies and the visibilities of desires that seeks to be colonized by so-called progressive neoliberalism is not reduced to just that. It potentially poses new libidinal arrangements and new forms of relationships that can be experienced in an anxious and distressing way, as it calls into question the very notion of psychological identity. On the other hand, neoliberalism is a way of managing psychic suffering, of displacing social contradictions onto individual forums, as if individuals and their supposed powerlessness were solely responsible for their inhibitions, symptoms and anguish. This situation can strengthen a crisis that, once again, can lead subjects to a defensive and reactive way out. That Brazil is currently the country with the highest number of cases of anxiety disorders in the world and one of the highest rates of diagnoses of depression (13.5% of the population) is something that should not be overlooked in this context. It shows how we are in a privileged place of intensification of psychic crises that provide an important element for the consolidation of adherence to the junction between fascism and neoliberalism.

Finally, I'd like to clarify the repeated use of the term "counter-revolution". Anyone who talks about counter-revolution is talking about another offensive and revolutionary force on the march. In fact, I would like to insist that we live in an insurrectionary era, except that "insurrection" is something that can occur in two opposite directions.

Regarding the insurrectionary nature of our time, with its sequence of revolts that began in 2011 with the Arab Spring and continues today, let's remember a Latin American case. In 2021, Colombia was faced with unprecedented demonstrations that took to the streets, causing the government to abandon a tax reform project that once again passed on the costs of the pandemic to the poorest. In the face of this, former right-wing president Alvaro Uribe called on his people to fight against a "dissipated molecular revolution" that was taking over the country.

The term had its *raison d'être*. For years, Latin America has experienced a series of popular uprisings whose strength has come from unprecedented articulations between a radical rejection of the neoliberal economic order, uprisings that at the same time tension all the levels of violence that make up our social models. The images of struggles against the tax reform, led by trans people asserting their social dignity or unemployed people barricading themselves in with feminists, explain well what "molecular revolution" means in this context. It means that we are facing uprisings that are not centralized in a line of command and that create situations that can reverberate, in a single movement, both the struggle against naturalized disciplines in the colonization of bodies and the definition of their supposed places, and against macro-structures of labour dispossession. These are uprisings that operate across the

board, calling into question, in a non-hierarchical way, all levels of the structures of reproduction of social life. Against this, Brazil mobilized the insurrectionary force of a popular fascism. In Brazil, the insurrection has changed sides and is taking place, among other things, against the possibility of the emergence of a popular sequence like the one we saw in Colombia. Against this fascist insurrection, we still don't have a political response to the problem.

- 1 I would like to thank The New Institute/ Hamburg for the stay in 2022, which allowed me to develop the ideas in this article.
- 2 ARENDT, 2020, p. 187
- 3 Let's remember Reich, who said: "*Fascism* is not, as people tend to believe, a purely reactionary movement, but it presents itself as an amalgam of revolutionary emotions and reactionary social concepts" (REICH, 2005, p. 17).
- 4 See, for example, DARDOT and LAVAL, 2019; PAXTON, 2016; RILEY, 2018 or the concept of 'post-fascism' in TRAVERSO, 2019
- 5 However, it's important to remember that fascist regimes were known even after the end of the Second World War. Franco's dictatorship (1936-1975) in Spain, as well as the apartheid regime in South Africa (1948-1994), to take just two examples, would hardly be outside an analytical definition of historical fascism, even though they were not regimes animated by the war of movement. They are proof of the possibility of the "administrative normalization" of fascism.
- 6 FURTADO, 2020
- 7 On the ontological distinction between "persons" and "things" in slave relations, see ESPOSITO, 2016
- 8 On the topic of civil war as a "normal" social situation, see above all PELBART, 2018
- 9 On the figure of the "predator state" see, for example: CHAMAYOU, 2010
- 10 As Elsa Dorlin reminds us: "Throughout the slavery period, the disarmament of the enslaved was accompanied by a real disciplinization of their bodies to keep them defenseless, which imposed the correction of minimal acts of martiality. This process has as its philosophical principle what is most characteristic of the servile condition: enslaved people are those who have neither the right nor the duty to preserve themselves. Consequently, disarmament must be understood as a security measure for free populations, but more fundamentally, it establishes a dividing line between subjects who are masters of themselves, solely responsible for their own preservation, and the enslaved, who do not belong to themselves and whose preservation depends entirely on the goodwill of their master" (DORLIN, 2019, p. 45).
- 11 For an analysis of the continuous nature of primitive accumulation and its logic of prolonged civil war, see ALLIEZ and LAZZARATTO, 2021.
- 12 See SAFATLE, 2022. See also FELDMANN and SANTOS, 2021.
- 13 Diagnosis made, among others, by ARANTES, 2008
- 14 On the lengthy analysis of this point, based on a precise understanding of Bolsonarism, see mainly NUNES, 2022.
- 15 STREECK, 2015
- 16 See FRASER, 2017
- 17 Idem, p. 104
- 18 An extensive and precise discussion of the authoritarian personality can be found in FERREIRA, 2018
- 19 FROMM, 1980. p. 110. For a discussion of Erich Fromm's first collaborations with the Institute for Social Research, see: JAY, 1996.
- 20 ADORNO, 1996, p. 30
- 21 MASLOW, 1943
- 22 REICH; 2001, p. 53
- 23 Idem, 2006, p. 56
- 24 HORKHEIMER and FLOWERMAN, 1949, p. 13
- 25 This is a thesis shared to some extent by Peter Gordon, for whom: "The AP study, I will suggest, developed two distinct lines of argument. The first of these, the "official" discovery of the research program, comprises the basic message that MacWilliams reiterates in the passages quoted above, namely, the claim to have identified a new "psychological type." The second argument is rather more sobering and radical in its implications: it suggests that the authoritarian personality signifies not merely a type but an emergent and generalized feature of modern society as such." (GORDON, 2017, p. 47)
- 26 ADORNO et alli; 2021, p. 79
- 27 Idem, p. 592
- 28 Idem, p. 82
- 29 Let's remember, for example, the Adornian approximation between astrology columns in newspapers and paranoid delusions in ADORNO, 2006.
- 30 On the relationship between cynicism and fascism, see chapter three of SAFATLE, 2008.
- 31 An important example of the heterodox rooting of Nazism in our value systems can be found in CHAPOUTOT, 2014.
- 32 DURKHEIM, 2003
- 33 ADORNO, 2015, p. 418
- 34 Idem, p. 421

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ADORNO, Theodor; *As estrelas descem a terra*, São Paulo: Unesp, 2006
- ____; *Educação e emancipação*, São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1996
- ____; *Ensaio de psicologia social e psicanálise*, São Paulo: Unesp, 2015,
- ADORNO, Theodor et alii; *Estudos sobre a personalidade autoritária*, São Paulo: Unesp, 2021,
- ALLIEZ, Eric and LAZZARATTO, Maurizio, *Guerra e Capital*, São Paulo: Ubu, 2021
- ARANTES, Paulo; *Extinção*, São Paulo: Boitempo, 2008
- ARENDT, Hannah; *Origens do totalitarismo*, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2020
- CHAMAYOU, Grégoire; *La chasse à l'homme*, Paris: La fabrique, 2010
- CHAPOUTOT, Johann; *La loi du sang: penser et agir en nazi*, Paris: Gallimard, 2014.
- DARDOT, Pierre and LAVAL, Christian; "Anatomie du nouveau néoliberalisme" (<http://reflexions-echanges-insoumis.org/anatomie-du-nouveau-neoliberalisme/>),
- DORLIN, Elsa; *Auto-defesa*, São Paulo: Ubu, 2019
- DURKHEIM, Emile; *Le suicide*, Paris: PUF, 2003
- ESPOSITO, Roberto; *As pessoas e as coisas*, Rafael Copetti, 2016
- FELDMANN, Daniel and SANTOS, Fábio; *O médico e o monstro: uma leitura do progressismo latino-americano*, São Paulo: Elefante, 2021
- FERREIRA, Virginia; "A personalidade autoritária: antropologia crítica e potencial fascista", Doctoral thesis (Department of Philosophy' University of São Paulo), 2018
- FRASER, Nancy; *Progressive neoliberalism versus reactionary populism: a Hobson's choice*, In: GEISELBERGEN, Heinrich (org); *The great regression*, London: Polity Press, 2017
- FROMM, Erich. *Arbeiter und Angestellte am Vorabend des Dritten Reiches*, Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1980. p. 110
- FURTADO, Celso; *Formação econômica do Brasil*, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2020
- GORDON, Peter; *The Authoritarian Personality Revisited: Reading Adorno in the Age of Trump*, *Boundary 2*, Volume 44, 2017
- HORKHEIMER, Max and FLOWERMAN, Samuel; *Studies in prejudice*, New York: 1949
- JAY, Martin. *The Dialectical Imagination*. Berkeley: California University Press, 1996
- MASLOW, Abraham; *The authoritarian character structure*, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, Volume 18, 1943
- NUNES, Rodrigo; *Do transe à vertigem*, São Paulo: Ubu, 2022
- PAXTON, Robert; "Is fascism back?" (<https://www.project-syndicate.org/onpoint/is-fascism-back-by-robert-o--paxton-2016-01?barrier=accesspaylog>), 2016
- PELBART, Péter Pal; "Da guerra civil", *Arquivos Brasileiros de Psicologia*, vol. 70, 2018
- REICH; Wilhelm; *Análise de caráter*, São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2001,
- ____; *La psychologie de masse du fascisme*, Paris: Payot, 2005
- RILEY, Dylan; "What's Trump?", *New Left Review*, n. 114, November 2018
- SAFATLE, Vladimir; *Cinismo e falência da crítica*, São Paulo: Boitempo, 2008.
- ____; *Só mais um esforço*, Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2022
- STRECK, Wolfgang; *How will capitalism end? Essays on a failing system*, London: Verso, 2015
- TRAVERSO, Enzo; *The new faces of fascism: populism and the far right*, London: Verso, 2019