

## **Brazilian fascism and anti-Semitism**

**Fascismo e antissemitismo à brasileira**

**Fascismo y antisemitismo brasileños**

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### **Abstract**

The article addresses the theme of fascism in contemporary times, based on the elements of anti-Semitism described by Adorno and Horkheimer in 1947 and through the empirical evidence that currently marks the adherence of Brazilian society to authoritarian and extremist movements. Theoretical discussion and the analysis of empirical situations allow us to affirm the existence of a Brazilian fascism, with very peculiar forms of adherence and expression. The issue of fake news is taken as an object of analysis of a process that has been increasingly worrying, both in terms of the significant number of people, who contribute decisively to its dissemination, and in terms of the composition of the resistance forces established by society, in the face of the danger that such news represents to democracy, to the formation of society, to the future of humanity and the planet, as a whole.

**Keywords:** Brazil; Fascism; Anti-Semitism; Authoritarianism; Democracy; Critical Theory.

### **Resumo**

O artigo aborda o tema do fascismo na contemporaneidade, a partir dos elementos do antissemitismo descritos por Adorno e Horkheimer em 1947 e por meio das evidências empíricas que marcam atualmente a adesão da sociedade brasileira à movimentos autoritários e extremistas. A discussão teórica e a análise de situações empíricas nos permitem afirmar, que existe um fascismo à brasileira, com formas de adesão e expressão bastante peculiares. A questão das *fake news* é tomada como objeto de análise de um processo que tem sido cada vez

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mais preocupante, tanto em termos do número significativo de pessoas, que contribuem decisivamente para sua disseminação, como em termos de composição das forças de resistência estabelecidas pelas sociedade civil, em face do perigo que tais notícias representam à democracia, à formação da sociedade, ao futuro da humanidade e do planeta, como um todo.

**Palavras-chave:** Fascismo; Antissemitismo; Autoritarismo; Teoria Crítica.

## Resumen

El artículo aborda el tema del fascim en la contemporaneidad, desde los elementos del antisemitismo descritos por Adorno y Horkheimer en 1947 y a través de la evidencia empírica que actualmente marca la adhesión de la sociedad brasileña a movimientos autoritarios y extremistas. La discusión teórica y el análisis de situaciones empíricas nos permiten afirmar que existe un fascismo al estilo brasileño, con formas de adhesión y expresión muy peculiares. El tema de *fake news* se toma como objeto de análisis de un proceso que ha sido cada vez más preocupante, tanto por el importante número de personas que contribuyen de manera decisiva a su difusión, como por la composición de las fuerzas de resistencia instauradas. por la sociedad sociedad civil, ante el peligro que representan tales noticias para la democracia, para la formación de la sociedad, para el futuro de la humanidad y del planeta en su conjunto.

**Palabras clave:** Fascismo; Antisemitismo; Autoritarismo; Teoría Crítica.

## Introduction

Investigating the genesis of fascism and anti-Semitism in Brazil is an arduous and fundamental task in order to understand contemporary society. As demonstrated by Bernardo (2015), the challenge is to approach the theme not from the outside, but from the inside, unveiling its social and political crossroads and the paradoxical paths in which its ideology continues. Therefore, it is necessary to decipher the silences of historiography and censorship by institutions, which impose a series of limits on researchers who recommend examining the subject from a theoretical-critical perspective.

We do not intend to trace here a factual history of fascism and anti-Semitism in Brazil, nor to consider the two concepts in a single and homogeneous way. Both fascism and anti-Semitism have fundamental differences and distinct historical origins, widely explored by historiography. When investigating the antecedents of fascism in Italy, Hobsbawm (2008) pointed out that Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) and his *camicie nere* did not consider themselves anti-Semitic until 1938, to the point that the Italian army had refused to deliver captured Jews to Germany's death camps. However, in the course of the historical process, fascism and anti-Semitism ended up influencing each other from the transformations and

appropriations of authoritarian movements in different countries. The peak of this confluence occurred in the 1930s, led by German Nazifascism, as shown by Adorno and Horkheimer (2006).

The confluence between fascism and anti-Semitism occurred through racist theories of social evolution which, with the acceptance of the academic community (Friedlander, 1995: 18-19) and the approval of the scientific authorities, naturalized social competition and capitalist exploitation. This theoretical structure developed since the end of the 19th century promulgated, in the name of progress and reason, the cruelest prejudices against racialized groups in different countries in the Western world. From the “science of racial improvement” or eugenics, European intellectuals associated the progress of certain human groups with the process of biological evolution, transposing the notions of Darwinism to the political-social terrain (BETHENCOURT, 2018).

According to Adorno and Horkheimer (2006), fascists did not consider Jews as a minority, but rather as an *anti-race*. Based on this logic, the discourse called for racial purification, through extermination, and the movement found fertile ground both among so-called fascists and among potential fascists around the world. According to Adorno: “What was not seen as a human being, and yet, is a human being, becomes a thing, so that you can no longer refute the manic look by any impulse” (ADORNO, 1993, p.91). Here is one of the explanatory keys to the holocaust.

Specifically in Brazil, what aspects of fascism and anti-Semitism could raise elements of reflection and discussion, in the current context of reconfiguration of conservatism and authoritarianism in the world? That is the purpose of this article.

### **Fascism and anti-Semitism in Brazil**

Founded by Plínio Salgado (1895-1975) in October 1932, months before Adolf Hitler's rise to Germany in January 1933, *Ação Integralista Brasileira* (AIB)<sup>5</sup> was the largest and most organized fascist movement in Latin America. His “doctrinal eclecticism” associated elements of original fascism and hegemonic theories of European fascism, which influenced Brazilian authors such as Alberto Torres (1865-1917), Euclides da Cunha (1866-1909) and Oliveira Viana (1883-1951). Despite not being organically linked to European

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<sup>5</sup> Brazilian Integralist Action was an integralist/fascist political party in Brazil.

Nazi-fascist regimes, several integralist militants agreed with their racist, anti-communist, authoritarian, nationalist and anti-Semitic ideals (Trindade, 2016), with emphasis on Gustavo Barroso (1888-1959) leader of AIB and first director of the Museu Histórico Nacional (1922-1930), considered the greatest theorist of anti-Semitism in Brazil (Maio, 1992). Even with the formal extinction of the movement in 1937 by the dictatorship of *Estado Novo* (1937-1945)<sup>6</sup>, some of its leaders assumed prominent positions during the period of the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985), of which: Raimundo Padilha (1899-1988), leader of the *Aliança Renovadora Nacional* (ARENA)<sup>7</sup> and Alfredo Buzaid (1914-1991), justice minister of the Médici government (1969-1974). According to the militants themselves, the military was “implementing many of the integralist ideas that could not be applied in the 1930s” (TRINDADE, 2016, p. 21).

The historiographic survey undertaken by Carneiro (2012: 79-80) indicated that research on anti-Semitism in Brazil began in the 1970s and intensified in the 1990s with the opening of police and diplomatic archives, such as the *Arquivo Histórico do Itamaraty* (RJ)<sup>8</sup> and the collection of the *Departamento de Ordem Política e Social* (DEOPS)<sup>9</sup>, under the custody of the Public Archives of the State of São Paulo. Such documents unveiled the existence of an anti-Semitic policy in the Vargas government (1930-1945) and in the Dutra government (1946-1950), as well as the persistence of myths, denials, censorship and historical misrepresentations on the subject. According to Carneiro:

In addition to the abundant documentation to be investigated, the researchers face adverse reactions from family members of diplomats (proven anti-Semites) who insist on maintaining laudatory biographies about their ancestors, as in the case of Oswaldo Aranha, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Vargas government (1937-1944), and Jorge Latour, Brazil's Chargé d'Affaires in Warsaw and Rome (1936 and 1938), among others. Even today, in the middle of the 21st century, different segments of Brazilian society continue to worship false heroes, omitting information or silencing facts that,

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<sup>6</sup> New State was a dictatorial period in Brazil during the rule of President Getúlio Vargas, initiated by a new constitution issued in November 1937. Vargas himself wrote it with the assistance of his minister of justice, Francisco Campos.

<sup>7</sup> The National Renewal Alliance was a conservative political party that existed in Brazil between 1966 and 1979. It was the official party of the military that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985.

<sup>8</sup> The collection of the Itamaraty Historical Archive is composed of documents produced, received and accumulated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil and the agencies that preceded it (Secretariat for Foreign Affairs and War of the Kingdom of Portugal (1736-1822) and Secretariat for Foreign Affairs of Empire of Brazil (1822-1889)).

<sup>9</sup> Created on December 30, 1924, it was an organ of the Brazilian government used mainly during the *Estado Novo* and later in the Military Dictatorship. It had the function of ensuring and disciplining military order in the country and was instituted on April 17, 1928 by law No. 2034, which tried to reorganize the State Police.

in a way, configured a negative profile to the character venerated as a hero (CARNEIRO, 2012, p. 80, free translation).

The critical perspective proposed by Carneiro (2012) allows us to see that the official speech before the *League of Nations*, which portrayed President Getúlio Vargas as the savior of the nation, and Brazil as a cordial, humanistic country, receptive to ethnicities and religions, is nothing more than a historical misrepresentation. In opposite lines, the newly discovered sources prove the *anti-Semitic praxis* of the Brazilian State, which during the years 1937 to 1948 kept secret circulars in order to prevent the granting of visas to thousands of Jewish refugees and concentration camp survivors. More than anti-communism, the deportation of Olga Benário Prestes (1908-1942) to the Third Reich in 1936 comprises “an act of collaboration with Nazi Germany and an expression of Brazilian political anti-Semitism” (CARNEIRO, 2012, p. 82- 84).

In the text *The Meaning of Working Through the Past*, Adorno (2008) warned of the survival of fascism in democratic societies and the threat posed by the control of the past. Far from being the result of neglect or chance, the act of erasing memories would be a rational, deliberate and planned act. The historical distortion based on the denial or easing of barbarism and the blaming of the victims constitutes one of the great challenges that are presented to researchers committed to the freedom of information and expression. As Carneiro (2012) pointed out, the digitization of the collections and their availability for public consultation consist of fundamental actions for the strengthening of democracy in the resistance against barbarism and its attacks against memory.

Although the terms *fascism* and *conservatism* are used in a generic and often inaccurate way in the context of the rise of the so-called conservative wave in post-redemocratization Brazil (ALMEIDA, 2019), the specialized literature denotes the permanence of both a mentality and Fascist practices in the country under the aegis of Bolsonarism. Asleep since the context of political openness, this mentality surfaced in the street demonstrations of the year 2013, in the 2014 elections, in the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff (b.1947) in 2016 and deepened after the election of Jair Messias Bolsonaro (b.1955) in 2018. Vazquez (2019) characterized this process as a revival of *protofascism* based on anti-corruption discourse, nationalism, anti-communism, militarism and criminalization of social movements. Captained by the middle class and attracting several

sectors of the working class, this movement guaranteed the election of an authoritarian candidate with a history of offenses and threats to *quilombola*<sup>10</sup> movements, workers, women, indigenous people and the LGBT community.

With a strengthened and radicalized base, Bolsonarism embodied a conservative project in the country since the end of the military dictatorship (1964-1985), channeling the reactionary discourse of the so-called *bible, bullet, and ox benches*<sup>11</sup> and other fractions of the extreme right (VAZQUEZ, 2019). Authors such as Boito Jr. (2020) characterize both the government and its support movement as neo-fascists, considering the possibility of the constitution of fascist governments within bourgeois democracies without the need for the establishment of dictatorships. In the case of Bolsonaro, "a predominantly neo-fascist government, based on a neo-fascist movement" at the head of a deteriorating bourgeois democracy and situated on the periphery of international capitalism. The *neofascist* designation is also used in the works of Mendes and Carnut (2020) and Cavalcante (2020), while Silva et.al (2019) conceptualizes Bolsonarism as a fusion between liberalism and fascism in charge of a post-democratic state that, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, has assumed its necroliberal propensity to exterminate the poorest (SILVA et.al, 2019).

Based on research carried out by anthropologist Adriana Dias from the *Universidade Estadual de Campinas* (UNICAMP) and data collected by the NGO Safernet, which demonstrated an exponential growth of neo-Nazi cells in Brazil with the advent of Bolsonarism, the report associates the empowerment of extremist groups with demonstrations of hatred against minorities by members of the government. In addition, it explains the *nazification* process of Brazilian society, with a strong xenophobic, racist, fascist and anti-Semitic appeal. This situation worsened with the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, a context in which the xenophobic speeches about the "Chinese virus" and the "international communist conspiracy" taken over by the Bolsonaro clan and by the former minister of education Abraham Weintraub (b.1971) were followed by a new worldwide anti-Semitic wave, which accuses the Jews of being the creators of the coronavirus (BRENER; GOLDENBAUM; BRAIA, 2020).

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<sup>10</sup> They are the descendants and remnants of communities formed by fugitive enslaved people (the quilombos), between the 16th century and the year 1888 (when slavery was abolished), in Brazil. Currently quilombola communities are present throughout the Brazilian territory, and there is a rich culture, based on black ancestry.

<sup>11</sup> The BBB Bench is a term used to refer to the bullet bench ("da bala"), rural bench ("do boi") and the evangelical bench ("da bíblia") in the National Congress of Brazil.

According to Barrucho (2020), the constant appearance of the Israeli flag in militant profiles on social networks and in pro-Bolsonaro demonstrations divided the Brazilian Jewish community, which led to the Israeli Confederation of Brazil (Conib), the *Instituto Brasil-Israel* (IBI) and the *Jews for Democracy* group to reaffirm their commitment to democracy and to repudiate the movements that attack the institutions. Criticized by anti-Semitic Bolsonarists on the *Stormfront.org* forum (ALESSI; HOFMEISTER, 2019), the rapprochement between Bolsonaro and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (b.1949) represents a nod to the United States of America and the pro-Israel neo-Pentecostal electorate, but it does not disguise the various anti-Semitic demonstrations by the Brazilian government. Published on January 16, 2020, the statement by the then secretary of culture Roberto Alvim (b.1973), who plagiarized excerpts from a speech by the Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels (1897-1945) to the sound of a composition by the anti-Semitic Richard Wagner (1813-1883) - Adolf Hitler's favorite composer - left no doubt about the presence of supporters of the extreme right-wing totalitarian regimes, not only on the support base, but also within government cadres (ALESSI; HOFMEISTER, 2020).

As demonstrated by Bernardo (2015), the history of fascism is not finished, because “fascism is still a suspended reality”. His stay in the form of paramilitary groups and the 334 neo-Nazi cells scattered throughout Brazil (ALESSI; HOFMEISTER, 2020) denounce that it “was militarily destroyed without being politically and ideologically depleted” (BERNARDO, 2015, p. 8). Likewise, the upsurge in anti-Semitic demonstrations during the Bolsonaro government denotes not only the relevance of the issue, but also the seriousness of the problem, mainly because it constitutes a serious threat to democracy and human rights. As Adorno (2008) warned us, fascism survives not because its supporters resist accepting his death, but because the disposition for his practices remains alive.

### **The elements of adherence to fascism in Brazil**

To think about the practices of adherence to fascism in the current global context of deepening and metamorphosis of the dynamics of mercantilization, and in a country like Brazil, marked by profound inequalities, resulting from its peripheral position occupied in the world economic dynamics, requires an understanding of the mechanisms of adherence to an extermination policy, which determines the socialization processes present in our daily lives.

According to Maar (2007), one of the constitutive marks of Brazil is the denial of recognition of humanity and of access to the conditions that make such humanity available to the majority of the population. Under the myth of racial democracy, dehumanization becomes the mode of operation of social totality. In this way, the main characteristic of fascism is evident, capable of involving even those who would not, in theory, be the direct target of extermination, but who will also have their lives totally affected by the consequences of fascism.

From the logic presented by Adorno and Horkheimer (2006), it is understood that fascism seeks to eliminate the elements that would otherwise prevent the progression of the system. This means that what cannot be adapted, or which points to the possibility of difference, is transformed into a sign of persecution. In other words, the object of hatred is always what represents the diverse, that is, alterity as a possibility and opposition. In this sense, some parallels can be drawn to demonstrate the maintenance of the logic of fascism between German anti-Semitism and the policy of precarity in life in Brazil. The Jew, among other characteristics, personify in the anti-Semitic imagery the figure of the foreigner who occupies a place to which he does not belong. Thus, the threat represented by him is evidenced in an affirmative way, that is, eliminating the Jew means also eliminating the threat (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 2006). In turn, in Brazil, what attracts hatred and becomes the target of fascist policies is the precarious working class, as well as everything that, instead of making their condition invisible or naturalizing it, marks their existence, such as, for example, the discourse and performance of progressive movements and parties (LOWY, 2015). If in the relationship with the Jew, his extermination was intended to restore a position that, according to the anti-Semitic discourse, was not legitimate for him, the threat posed by the precarity of living conditions, does not mobilize the revolt against social inequality as a response, but on the contrary, hatred against what evidences it.

Such fascism has as its reason and practice the daily repression and ideological mobilization to maintain the naturalization of exploitation, in a way that, along with the determination of the way of organizing the productive forces and the dynamics of extermination associated with them, adherence practices are reproduced, thus deepening the truth of dehumanization that is generalized from the focus on the group chosen for the extermination. One of the characteristics that follows, from the progression of fascist rationality beyond anti-Semitism, is that it reaches and shapes positions that should be

exercised in opposite ways, but that are equal, constituting a social whole in which “good and evil know the same fate” (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 2006, p. 170).

In this sense, the impossibility of affirming the difference, which marks fascism, is also present in the inability to characterize correctly what the opposition should be built on, and just as it happens with the supporters of anti-Semitism, the progressive sector falsifies its enemy, restricting the opponent to confrontations and clashes that only reach the ramifications of the main power structure. Such a framework of plastering the capacity for opposition reveals itself in the mark of contemporary fascist movements: its articulation (BRAY, 2019). This outlines practices and discourses that are not explicitly proclaiming racial supremacy, allowing the phenomenon to manifest itself in a more popular and widespread manner.

Thus, understanding the persistence of fascism has to do with the elaboration of the dynamics of adhesion that constitute the basis that is characteristic of it. Likewise, illuminating the scenario of authoritarianism in Brazil today, spearheaded by the election of Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency of the republic, requires a return to understanding the episodes that forged his rise and victory at the polls. Here, it is considered that such episodes have the popular demonstrations of June 2013 as a landmark, an event that is established as a central point to articulate an understanding about the recent political scenario in the country. Thus, in addition to the various analyzes about the meaning of such a moment and the institutional factors that constitute it (NOBRE, 2020), it is important to identify the elements that were present in the mobilizations that occurred at that moment.

The protests that took over the country, in June of that year, have as an important characteristic the fact that they were not organized primarily by parties or social movements, but that they emerged from diverse and non-centralized demands (NOBRE, 2020; REBUÁ, 2019). With such a landmark as a reference, the need for understanding both the previous events and circumstances and their subsequent developments emerges as a perspective of analysis. Regarding the previous conditions, it is worth noting that, as Nobre (2020) points out, that Brazil was not yet in a period of recession, on the contrary, the country had the lowest unemployment rate since the beginning of the historical series in 2002. With regard to developments, what happened was the evidence of the failure of a democratic model that was no longer able to operate conciliation and that was not able to absorb the demands that took shape at that moment.

Considering such aspects, what is noticeable at the beginning is the increasing mobilization capacity already present among the population. It can be said that, given the policies of income distribution and investment in public services carried out by previous governments, there was a kind of strengthening of the public sphere, expanding the spaces for popular participation, which allowed the disposition for the claim, although there was no scenario of fragility and attack on the material conditions of existence, which would come to pass in the following years. On the other hand, when considering the unfolding of the events, there is the presence of a double exhaustion of the conciliation policy adopted until then (NOBRE, 2020), manifested both by popular demands, raised in the face of threats of withdrawals of conquests, and on the part of the middle class, discontented, given the threat identified by the increase in purchasing power also from the lower classes.<sup>12</sup>

It can be seen, therefore, that the stability experienced during the period of redemocratization of the country has its fragility exposed in 2013, which results from the collapse that was fundamental to allow the election of Bolsonaro and the conditions for his maintenance in power. The inability to absorb popular demands, given the failure of the democratic project in progress, and accompanied, also as a result of this failure, by the demobilization of progressive political sectors, generated a climate of frustration that ended up being captured by the authoritarian populism that builds thus, the bases for the accomplishment of his government (ZAMORA, 2020). In a process settled by resentment (KEHL, 2013), the energies mobilized in 2013 and frustrated in the fulfillment of their demands are captured in the projection of the enemy image in certain groups identified as responsible for the problems that triggered these yearnings of revolt.

The permanence of the principle of self-preservation that sustains the weakened ego of those predisposed to fascism, promotes adherence to the idea, for example, that individuals are responsible for their own marginalized condition and should not be objects of public policy. However, the reason why it is characteristic of the targets of fascism to be figures devoid of economic power is precisely the fact that these are the ones who authorize criticisms of the hegemonic economic and political system, and which could allow “making individuals aware of the irrational character of their compulsion to social adaptation”

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<sup>12</sup> The MPL (*Movimento Passe Livre*), which means Free Fare Movement is a Brazilian social movement that advocates the adoption of free fares in mass transit. On June 6, 2013 it took to the streets the mobilization against the increase in bus, subway and train fares in São Paulo, an act repeated on the following day. “*Não é pelos 20 centavos*” (It is not for 20 cents) were common sayings on the demonstrators' posters, referring to the increase in ticket prices in São Paulo, which would rise to R\$ 3.20 (ODILLA, 2018).

(ALVES JUNIOR, 2020, p. 29). For this reason, they must be perceived not in their historical determinations, but as enemies to be pursued and exterminated.

The basic aspect of authoritarianism, the blurred and threatening figure of the other, arising from a structural characteristic that prevents processes of identification and differentiation, leaves space for propaganda to be that which promotes social coherence (ALVES JUNIOR, 2020). In the absence of conditions for training, in a space emptied of the subject's experience, propaganda virtually becomes the substance of the same thing, as happened with the figure of the Jews in Nazi Germany. As indicated by Adorno (2019), the inversion present in the fact that social organization imposes itself as a threat to the lives of the individuals that constitute it, allows us to identify that radical right-wing movements transform propaganda into the very substance of politics, replacing the debate and guidance through the truth by distortion and consented lies. This must be defended by those who have nothing to gain from such a system other than the perverse satisfaction in survival conditioned by adherence to the calculation of extermination as a rule, the culmination of which is reached in fascism.

Thus, as the control mechanism to prevent the practice of otherness and opposition from being constituted, fascism depends on an apparatus not only for extermination, but also for ideological mobilization, which maintains its functioning (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 2006). This is the dynamics of the so-called fake news, that is, the mass circulation, and preferably over the internet, of false information conveyed as true, and of content that is sometimes absurd and ludicrous.

### **Expression of fascism and anti-Semitism: the problem of fake news**

Since 2016, the effects of fake news have been discussed in democracies, mainly regarding their role in the dissemination of false information and influence on the results of elections and plebiscites (ALLCOTT; GENTZKOW, 2017; DELMAZO; VALENTE, 2018). The content of fake news is generally made up of absurd ideas and opinions, with no connection to real events, to which the subjects remain obstinately attached, even after their untruth has been demonstrated. Many studies resort to the explanation that such behavior is due to cognitive gaps or lack of knowledge (GELFERT, 2018; BAKIR; MCSTAY, 2018; OSMUNDSEN et al., 2020). Others focus on the functioning of social networks, algorithms

and fake accounts that spread fake news, aiming to justify a way of detecting these messages and contain their spread (SHAO et al., 2018; LAZER et al., 2018; BAKIR; MCSTAY, 2018).

Many articles discuss the definition of fake news (RECUERO; GRUZD, 2019; OSMUNDSEN et al., 2020). Although there is no consensus, it is agreed that fake news is a deliberate attempt to present false or unrealistic content as if it were true, in an attempt to imitate the news format for the purpose of misinformation (TANDOC Jr.; WEI LIM; LING, 2018; GELFERT, 2018). Since the traditional news media approached social networks, adhering to their format, it has become easier to imitate them (LAZER et al., 2018; ALLCOTT; GENTZKOW, 2017). However, some fake news are videos and audios that are different from the reportage format, which does not prevent them from being passed and passed on in private messages, making their detection difficult - such as what happens in WhatsApp. There is almost no mention of these cases in the literature, however, they are indications of the great adherence to such news. There is still uncertainty as to whether the term should be applied to those cases where the error on the reported facts is accidental. Although such carelessness can cause problems, what is at issue here is the internal and external dynamics of individuals that promote the production and reproduction of fake news, based on these errors and personal opinions.

Adorno (2005) writes that a distinction is believed to exist between “normal opinion”, which would be based on facts, and “pathological opinion”, alienated from the facts, and that normal opinions would prevail over pathological ones. However, these last ones - deformed by prejudices, unfounded beliefs and superstitions - have found their way through history. Its persistence can be demonstrated by adherence to fake news. Adorno (2005, p. 119) comments that, despite its element of unreality, “the objective world is approaching the image persecution mania renders of it” - see the surveillance of social networks on private life -, which impels us to take pathological opinion and fake news as a true moment of reality.

According to Adorno (2005), society does not fulfill the conditions that would make sense of the expression of opinion. In 2020, the *Fake News Inquiry at the Supreme Federal Court*<sup>13</sup> sparked the discussion on the topic in Brazil. It is an open investigation to ascertain the existence of false news defaming the Supreme Court. In June, after a plea for unconstitutionality and censorship, a trial was held that decided to continue the investigation. The argument is to disarm the “disinformation machine” planned to discredit democratic

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<sup>13</sup> Available at: <https://portal.stf.jus.br/noticias/verNoticiaDetalhe.asp?idConteudo=445860&ori=1> and <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-53003097>. Access on August 23, 2020.

institutions, with the purpose of instituting chaos and resorting to totalitarian solutions (AMORIM, 2020). The deans said that expressions of hatred, threats to life, defamation of institutions and requests for the establishment of dictatorial regimes - found in fake news against the Supreme Court - are actions that are unworthy of the constitutional protection of freedom of expression. Indeed, for Adorno (2015), this concept presupposes a free society composed of emancipated individuals. Free expression would presume an identity between individual consciousness and a rational universal interest; but such an identity is hindered. The current organization produces and reproduces conditions that lead to the subjects' regression and non-freedom.

In the progress of knowledge, the idea of truth ends up being attenuated as a union of opinions taken as true (ADORNO, 2005). With increasing relativism and individualism, theoretical thinking is deprived of the power to analyze reality; it comes close to "[...] a chaos of undirected, accidental ideas and forces, the blindness of which drives the social totality toward its downfall" (ADORNO, 2005, p. 115). Metaphysical attempts to see a rationality in this whole risk being megalomaniacal in its arbitrariness without self-reflection. On the other hand, positivism attributes truth to existence without judging it, delivering reality to a mythical destination; with that, what is left for the subject is to bow "[...] in a humiliating way in the face of domination" (ADORNO, 1993, p.85). The truth requires imagination tensioned with receptivity to facts; it does not mean bowing to facts, nor creating facts out of oneself (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 2006).

Opinion is a subjective, individual and provisional statement, which can be confirmed only later. When unveiling reality, the subject must reflect on the opinion issued, avoiding its hypostasis. However, when it becomes public, it is protected from such revision by narcissism - the tendency to take its own self as an object of love, in a repressed way (ADORNO, 2005). Affirming opinion, making values and ideas public, has been associated, throughout history, with nobility and authority, with the ability to say what you think; something typical of the ruling classes. Thus, the opinion is invested with affection and any attack on it is perceived as personal injury. This results in stubbornness and attachment to false statements. To defend against narcissistic injury, the individual makes rationalizations, that is, uses rationalist and logical mechanisms to defend irrationalities. In this, one invents false conceptual systems to defend his point of view and the absurdity is protected by schematic walls. This kind of subjective isolation is now reinforced by the functioning of social networks, which

automatically present users with content with which one has already demonstrated affinity, keeping them from confronting contrary ideas (MARIANI, 2018; SHAO et al., 2018; BAKIR; MCSTAY, 2018; RECUERO; GRUZD, 2019). Adorno (2015) argues that this is a characteristic of fascist propaganda, to reinforce existing prejudices and beliefs. The acolytes are attracted because they verbalize opinions that they did not yet have the courage to express, but with which, in their heart, they already agreed.

The proliferation of opinions speaks of the objectivity that has become more difficult to see at first sight. The persistent irrationality of society - which is rational only in its means, not in its ends - makes the fate of the individual opaque, endowing it with a mythic character (ADORNO, 2005). Pathological opinions are necessary to tolerate domination, which continues as a principle of society: everyone must have a little bit of persecution delusion (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 2006). However, this kind of madness reinforces integration with totalitarian systems. By clinging to ideas that have a logic, even if illusory, one avoids recognizing the contradictions of reality and it remains unquestioned. Rationalizations are of psychological use in guiding individuals in the world. Their impotence in the face of the whole social apparatus would constitute an unbearable pain if it were perceived. The compensation for this is the self-confidence acquired by being part of a “select group” that “knows the truth” and has well-professed ideas. Fake news creates these collectives that come together around a common idea, pitting themselves against those outside that disagree with their theories (DELMAZO; VALENTE, 2018; OSMUNDSEN et al., 2020). But, in this, individuals regress to “[...] the infantile narcissistic prejudice that only 'I' am good and allelse is inferior and bad” (ADORNO, 2005, p. 111).

A characteristic form of these opinions is *nationalism* (ADORNO, 2005). In socialization, individual narcissism is repressed; self-praise and vanity are undesirable. The way out is the collective narcissism provided by the idea of the nation. However, the taboo imposed on individual narcissism hinders its elaboration and lends a harmful power to nationalism. In its regression to its infantile state, each country is exaggeratedly felt as better than all the others, as supremely good. Nationalism is a false identification; false because it steals individuality (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 2006). The person thrown into the mass pursues stereotyped collective ideals, which are not authentically theirs. This takes the individual effort of reflection out of the way (ADORNO, 2015). Nationalism means surrendering to that mythical destiny, which identifies society and nature, the proper reduction

of totalitarian movements. In this sense, fake news that defends patriotism comes close to the propaganda of fascist movements - and, notably, Recuero and Gruzd (2019) found that accounts identified as “patriots” on social networks were major spreaders of fake news. An element found in these news - and which is a characteristic of fascism - is the construction of imaginary enemies. Fantasies of the Jew, the Communist, the Chinese are built, obeying that manichaeian fixation, in which other nations seem threatening and are persecuted.

The following sequence of fake news exemplifies the exacerbated nationalism that seeks imaginary enemies. The news website Brasil 247 published, on March 23, 2020, the article entitled *Xi Jinping says that the time has come for China to lead the world*<sup>14</sup>, based on a report from the G1 website<sup>15</sup>. The original video reports the conference of the Chinese Communist Party, in which the presidency of the country is decided. The aforementioned “leadership” seems to be linked to the search for a greater presence in the world political-economic scenario. The disclosure on the Brasil 247 website, however, soon went through a correction: the publication of the video in G1 was from 2017. Nevertheless, the title of the report triggered conspiracy theories that spread and resulted in publications such as that of the *Jornal da Cidade Online* website, linking the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 to the Chinese plan to achieve the goals of “world leadership”. The end of the text leaves this possibility open: “Xi Jinping [...] seems to be working with the firm intention of implementing the strategy announced that day. It remains to be seen whether Coronavirus is part of this strategy...”<sup>16</sup>. This supposed opening is characteristic of fascist propaganda: people are given the freedom to draw their own conclusions, which is somewhat illusory, as they are driven by insinuations to a prefabricated conclusion (ADORNO, 2015). The trick makes them feel part of a group that shares a secret<sup>17</sup>.

Despite its contradiction, opinion is a step towards knowledge. Every thought goes beyond the facts, but “[...] this difference between thought and its factual confirmation harbors the potential for delusion as well as for the truth” (ADORNO, 2005, p. 108). Confirmation can only be done through complex mediations, making it difficult to distinguish

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<sup>14</sup> Available at: <https://www.brasil247.com/mundo/presidente-da-china-diz-que-chegou-a-hora-de-o-pais-pais-liderar-o-mundo>. Accessed: March 25, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/globonews/jornal-globonews-edicao-das-10/video/presidente-da-china-diz-que-chegou-a-hora-do-pais-pais-liderar-o-mundo-6225514.ghtml>. Accessed: March 25, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Available at: <https://www.jornaldacidadeonline.com.br/noticias/19488/em-2017-xi-jinping-conclamou-os-comunistas-chineses-chegou-a-hora-da-china-liderar-o-mundo-veja-o-video>. Accessed: March 25, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> The following address discusses other fake news related to the case, available at: <https://poligrafo.sapo.pt/fact-check/coronavirus-xi-jinping-diz-que-chegou-a-hora-de-a-china-lead-the-world>. Access on 08/25/2020.

well-founded thoughts from mere opinions. Overcoming arbitrariness can only be achieved in relation to the object. “Thinking is no mere subjective activity but [...] essentially the dialectical process between subject and object in which both poles first mutually determine each other. [...] Opinion is above all consciousness that does not yet have its object” (ADORNO, 2005, p. 109-110). Concepts must find their confirmation in reality, for the thought that takes itself only as an object operates in a vacuum and becomes stupid. Some of this is in the opinion that develops entrenched in itself, based on an internal logic that dispenses with confrontation with reality - confrontation that would force its transformation. Insisting on opinion tends to the inability to stop, to reflect, which can be called "pathological projection".

“In a sense, to perceive is to project” (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 2006, p. 154). The projection mechanism is spontaneous, inherent to knowledge and accompanies humanity in its phylogenesis and ontogenesis. The projection was used as a means of survival; in the face of danger, man attributed characteristics to the object, even without fully knowing it, in order to protect himself. Individually, its improvement is the basis for the distinction between interior and exterior. When reflecting the object, the subject defines it as a unit based on what he receives and projects from it; retroactively, the self is formed as something different from the object. Therefore, the pathological is not the projection itself, but the absence of its elaboration. Without recognizing the object, the individual does not recognize himself, does not differentiate what is proper from the object and what is projection. Without this tension, the conscience weakens and the subject attributes to the external world everything found in himself. But he is formed by the hostile objectivity of thoughtless praxis, irrational means and domination. In the face of these threats, the projection acts as an archaic weapon of self-preservation: the individual acquires paranoid traits, opposes everything and believes that his unhappiness and his lack of meaning are external and independent of him. With the regression to childish narcissism, he sees himself as good and sees perdition in the world - and he cannot stop, because “the idea that does not find firm support in reality insists and becomes fixed” (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 2006, p. 157). In creating the world from what he projects from it, the paranoid sews everything in a mythical fabric. In these conditions, the individual is susceptible to fascist propagandas, which devise plots that justify the discharge of frustrations in minorities (ADORNO, 2015).

However, individuals with paranoid tendencies are not alone, as they share their constructions of obscure systems. Using formulas to justify misfortune and to prophesy catastrophes, they believe they are salvation. As an example, a theory circulates on the internet that the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018, which had 57,796,986<sup>18</sup> votes, was manipulated by "dark forces". The evidence used is the coincidence of the first digits of the count with the Jewish year of 2018: 5779. This idea also highlights the ambivalence of Bolsonarism towards the Jewish community, as the answers are sometimes positive, sometimes negative (BRENER; GOLDENBAUM; BRAIA, 2020). By forcing absurd logic as a justification for paranoia, the incitement attracts minds accustomed to closed schemes of science and religion. Paranoia is widespread, transformed into movement. A pseudoscience or pseudo religion is built with hierarchical organizations, whose leaders choose for individuals, in their desperate self-preservation, where to project the terror that the systems themselves excited. For Adorno (2015, p. 144), "the prevailing conditions in our society tend to transform [...] moderate madness into a commodity, which the patient can easily sell, if he finds out that many others have an affinity with his own disease". This excerpt was written in 1946, but it is surprising how close it is to what social networks engender about the proliferation of fake news: countless users take advantage of the attraction they exert and, selling their pages to advertisers, profit from its spread (SHAO et al., 2018; TANDOC Jr.; WEI LIM; LING, 2018; GELFERT, 2018; BAKIR; MCSTAY, 2018; ALLCOTT; GENTZKOW, 2017; DELMAZO; VALENTE, 2018).

## Conclusions

Finally, we intended to clarify with the analyzes that followed in this article, that fascism is present in Brazil and has its own characteristics of adhesion and expression. In theoretical terms, the way of operating adherence to fascism continues to be guided by the appearance necessary for the conformity of will and thought, which is repeated incessantly by the way of capturing judgment. Anti-Semitic propaganda, which worked on the basis of not elaborating ideas and arguments, but of manipulating unconscious mechanisms (ADORNO, 2015), now operates without even dispensing forms of manipulation.

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<sup>18</sup> In the video entitled "5779 URNAS DE BOLSONARO VS CALENDARIO JUDAICO", this theory is commented, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tdVB39EuRU>. Accessed on 08/29/2020.

The picture with the empirical elements that we present shows “the psychic dispositions of individuals socialized under capitalism that make them vulnerable to forces and anti-democratic movements” (ZAMORRA, 2020, p.23), constituting the conditions for the emergence of the potentially fascist individual, susceptible to policies that reinforce domination. The psychic conflict to which the socialized are subjected in this mode of organization results from the need to survive in increasingly insecure conditions and in the face of which they are powerless and weakened. In turn, the dominant social structure, which determines the production of mobilization and adhesion, offers different appearances that, however, are unified in a single mode of operation. It follows that, beyond any difference, what continues to remain a reality is extermination, and, therefore, fascism as the dominant policy.

What is expressed in fake news, and which is found in fascist propaganda, is nothing less than destruction itself (ADORNO, 2015). The insistence on catastrophes is not just a coincidence, “the gaze fixed on misfortune has something of fascination” (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 2006, p. 190). The individual is excited by the idea of ruin, without being able to differentiate the destruction of the other from the destruction of himself, corroborating self-sacrifice as a principle of the current civilization, which makes the human being a means and annihilates him. Those persecuted by fascism are those who show possibilities of overcoming present conditions, the unnecessary attachment to the dictates of the system to which individuals identify themselves - as an example, the borderless homeland of the Jews. Domination endures because the dominated have had to learn to hate their aspirations and project them distortedly over those who remind them of what has been abandoned. Thus, the followers of such ideas are also victims.

As Adorno (1993, p. 19) indicates, only the “[...] gaze that turns to the horrible, resists it and before it sustains, with implacable awareness of negativity, the possibility of something better”, can overcome the enchantment of established powers. Thought must resist arbitrary opinion and projection, refusing itself when it realizes it is wrong, not agreeing with itself and insisting on this error (ADORNO, 2005). Humanity is only hopeful if overcoming the “self-affirmation immune to reflection” (ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 2006, p. 164). The inability to wait for something other than what exists is the basis for fascism's paranoid reaction, by forcing an anguished reconciliation between the individual and society, which actually leads to the destruction of the former.

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*Received: September/2021.  
Approved on: October/ 2021.*