

Within the hurricane we call progress... fascism?

Escañuela Romana, Ignacio¹
Social and Political Philosophy

In 1994, Duverger spoke of a second type of fascism, to which he added a third for the future. This one would be based on spectacle, image, and the projection of myths of success.

We are living in strange times, in which we no longer know how to place groups and ideas, we get lost in details, we establish classifications that make it harder for us to understand social phenomena. A shocking time in which the word "fascist" has become so trivialised that it has almost lost all interest and meaning. If the range of regimes is so diverse, if we do not know what we are dealing with, what can we do? And yet fascism remains one of the great contemporary ideologies, the most recent and the most difficult to understand. Historically, it has been the cause of terrible genocides.

It is the events closest to us that are the most complex to recognise and interpret. However, what is secondary and dispensable is ideological and, instead of helping to understand, contributes to confusion. The words "extreme" and "populism" are used in the political and scientific spheres to unite ideas that are openly antagonistic. Populism would be any ideology that rejects the opposition and affirms the existence of an elite whose political action goes against the interests of the common people, to whom it appeals. But this is not in fascism but a propagandistic appearance, precisely in the ideology that defends the existence of an elite that must hold power because of its natural superiority. If we believe in the unavoidable character of elites, we will end up affirming the necessity of the caudillo, condotiero or führer. Of course, Machiavelli's *The Prince* or discourse on the timeless technique of the use of power, with a certain contempt for the masses.

Interestingly, you cannot be a populist once you are in power. You cannot be anti-elitist when you occupy that elitist status. This calls for a permanent revolution that focuses on the enemies as the defining factor. That constant cultural, technological or other warfare that Walter Benjamin points out to us.

Umberto Eco was right to speak of a universal or original fascism, a kind of ever-present core that could be hidden under reassuring appearances. He thus tried to detail repetitive characteristics such as nationalism, anti-modernism and the cult of tradition, elitism and others. He agrees with Mannheim to point out the emphasis on irrationalism: it is an ideology that does not present rational rules (a regular order) for organising political life, that does not try to find historical regularities or laws of development, but believes in the crucial act, in action for its own sake. The myth, then, of the hero-saviour.

This irrationalism inevitably leads one to reject the legitimacy of parliaments. A disqualification of a democratically formed will. The belief in the founding myth of a people or nation and the natural authority of the self-identified hero or elite also entails, Eco points out, fear of the different: racism and xenophobia. Finally, the will to power leads to sexual issues: an

undisguised sexism that we find as a banner of these movements. With this activism and the myth of action, the use of force is proposed, and heroism is mythologised. Agreements and debates: now not as ends in a democracy for the formation of democratic will, but as intermediate points that are used. The programme can be modified at will.

Then, what is fascism? It is an internal colonialism that excludes a part of the population as inferior and rules from a powerful elite, which justifies itself as heir to a mythical tradition, a lover of power just for its own sake, prone to violence of one kind or another. To achieve this colonial position, one needs to practice what Walter Benjamin brilliantly detected: that eternal war. War on all fronts: including cultural and economic. Grossman perceived it: fascism divides men into pure and impure, worthy and unworthy. As Primo Levi observed, the violence it exercises is not between equals, but between men and others thought to be inferior.

So are we in an age of fascism? It can be seen in the constant attack on the formation of democratic will, the closing of discourse. In short, in the trend of relevant political groups to deny the differences between left and right, claiming that they are a matter of the past and tend to harm the mythical people. It is described in the cultural war against the opening of information, against the Enlightenment proposal that we should think for ourselves, before the tribunal of our own reason. That Sapere Aude declared by Kant.

Our moment is one of social shifts and a loss of class consciousness and cohesive groups. Is it related to the rise in social inequalities that seems to be leading us back to the patrimonial (rentier) capitalism analysed by Piketty? Or is it the fall in social classes and trade union capacity that encourages this inequality? With no cohesive groups with a vision of values and interests, we would be in a time of putschist groups (Mannheim). Besides, we are at the beginning of the age of propaganda, with the new and growing technological capabilities to make it pervasive, a world situated in media and social networks where everything is subject to manipulation and a critical and costly ability to differentiate facts and opinions is needed.

Fascism is making a comeback, as a theme and a possibility, but also potentially as a growing political group. That naked technique of power for its own sake that seeks an enemy, pursues a constant war in all spheres and wants to take over the state.

In the end, only by opening up the field of thought and sharing the kind of society we want, by admitting that differences are a richness, by using freedom and our willingness to discuss values and principles with each other, can we get out of this point we are in.

References

Benjamin, W. (1930/ 1979). Theories of German Fascism. *New German Critique*, 17, pp. 120-128.

Duverger, M. (1994). ¿Un tercer tipo de fascismo? *El País*, 24 de marzo de 1994.

Eco, U. (1995). Ur-fascism. *The New York review of books*, 42(11), 12-15.

Grossman, V. (1959/ 2011). *Life and Fate* (Vintage Classic Russians Series): Vasily Grossman. Random House.

Kant, I. (1784/ 2013). *An answer to the question: 'What is enlightenment?'*. Penguin UK.

Levi, P. (1986/ 2017). *The drowned and the saved*. Simon and Schuster.

Mannheim, K. (1929/ 2013). *Ideology and utopia*. Routledge.

Machiavelli, N. (1532/ 1993). *The prince*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions.

Piketty, T. (2013). *Le capital au XXIe siècle*. Média Diffusion.

ⁱ ignaciosro@gmail.com <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5376-0543>
<https://philpeople.org/profiles/ignacio-escauela-romana>