


Por uma educação antifascista no Brasil contemporâneo

For an anti-fascist education in contemporary Brazil

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Received on February 20, 2024

Approved on April 15, 2024

Published on March 24, 2025

RESUMO

A educação é uma instituição social que sustenta determinadas configurações sociais. Mas também pode representar uma dimensão crucial no processo de transformação e emancipação social. Assim, reformas educacionais podem ou não pleitearem a transformação social ou apenas promoverem os ajustes necessários para a reprodução de estruturas sociais vigentes. Partindo do questionamento sobre as possibilidades educativas de combate aos avanços fascistas no Brasil contemporâneo e no mundo, esta pesquisa qualitativa bibliográfica objetiva defender a possibilidade de uma educação antifascista no cenário brasileiro. Para tanto, há uma identificação e breve análise de pretensos fundamentos teórico-conceituais, metodológicos e pedagógicos deste tipo de educação a ser considerado nessa luta. O combate à fascistização da vida social é uma luta contra as configurações sociais que empoderam as estratégias de manipulação fascista, mas também uma resistência coletiva e uma reconstrução intermitente de processos educacionais inclusivos que respeitem e reconheçam as diferenças. Devido à afinidade entre o neoliberalismo e o neofascismo, uma educação antifascista é, a princípio, uma educação antineoliberal.

Palavras-chave: Fascismos; Educação antifascista; Fascistização.

ABSTRACT

Education is a social institution that sustains certain social configurations. But it can also represent a crucial dimension in the process of social transformation and emancipation. Thus, educational reforms may or may not promote social transformation or merely promote the necessary adjustments for the reproduction of current social structures. Starting from the question about the educational possibilities

for combating fascist advances in contemporary Brazil and in the world, this qualitative bibliographic research aims to defend the possibility of anti-fascist education in the Brazilian scenario. To this end, there is an identification and brief analysis of the alleged theoretical-conceptual, methodological and pedagogical foundations of this type of education to be considered in this struggle. The fight against the fascistization of social life is a fight against social configurations that empower fascist manipulation strategies, but also a collective resistance and an intermittent reconstruction of inclusive educational processes that respect and recognize differences. Due to the affinity between neoliberalism and neofascism, an anti-fascist education is, in principle, an anti-neoliberal education.

Keywords: Fascisms; Anti-fascist education; Fascistization.

RESUMEN

La educación es una institución social que sustenta determinadas configuraciones sociales. Pero también puede representar una dimensión crucial en el proceso de transformación social y emancipación. Así, las reformas educativas pueden promover o no la transformación social o simplemente promover los ajustes necesarios para la reproducción de las estructuras sociales actuales. A partir de la pregunta sobre las posibilidades educativas de combatir los avances fascistas en el Brasil contemporáneo y en el mundo, esta investigación bibliográfica cualitativa tiene como objetivo defender la posibilidad de la educación antifascista en el escenario brasileño. Para ello, se realiza una identificación y breve análisis de los supuestos fundamentos teórico-conceptuales, metodológicos y pedagógicos de este tipo de educación a ser considerados en esta lucha. La lucha contra la fascistización de la vida social es una lucha contra las configuraciones sociales que potencian las estrategias de manipulación fascistas, pero también una resistencia colectiva y una reconstrucción intermitente de procesos educativos inclusivos que respeten y reconozcan las diferencias. Debido a la afinidad entre neoliberalismo y neofascismo, una educación antifascista es, en principio, una educación antineoliberal.

Palabras clave: Fascismos; Educación antifascista; Fascistización.

Introduction

In Brazil and around the world, we observe the rise of fascist or neo-fascist groups which, although they have not yet achieved political and governmental hegemony, act incessantly to dismantle democratic achievements and recently gained civilizational values by employing violence against individuals, specific social groups,

and cultural values aligned with diversity and respect for human and social differences.

The emancipatory nature of education has become one of the main elements of critical social and educational theorizing, delegating to the curriculum, as the core of any formative process, the territory of resistance and formatting of emancipatory processes in a given community. Beyond the explicit curriculum, it is also possible to construct emancipatory pedagogical practices and anti-fascist resistance. In this sense, can education and schools confront barbarism and the ongoing fascistization of the social fabric occurring both globally and specifically in Brazil? If education can foster transformation, then one of the goals of schools could be the fight against fascism and the escalation of violence in Brazilian society. What is the anti-fascist power of contemporary education? And in what ways can anti-fascist education be materialized?

We highlight Bezerra's (2019) understanding of fascistization as an operational category for the reflections presented in this article. The author defines fascistization as a constant and progressive reifying process involving legal, political, and diverse ideological manifestations that endorse the political, philosophical, and organizational principles and tactics of classical fascism without necessarily reproducing all of its dimensions.

This article aims to discuss the potentialities of an anti-fascist education within the Brazilian social context. It is a qualitative bibliographic study that focused on national academic works, particularly those related to critical social theory, in order to build an approximation of what we might understand as an anti-fascist educational process. The text first discusses some definitions of fascism to establish an operational definition of fascist education. It then moves on to outline some key features of an anti-fascist educational process.

About Fascism: approaches to the phenomenon

There is no consensus on the definition of fascism or on the phenomena that can be referred to by the word “fascism.” Recently, the debate surrounding it has been fueled by the massification of far-right movements, raising the issue of whether or not such movements should be classified as fascist (Ferreira; Gomes, 2021).

Demian Melo (2020) points out that, when talking about fascism, although Italian and German fascisms are the most remembered for having achieved power and implemented dictatorial regimes, there were fascist movements that did not come to power, or that gained power through broader right-wing coalitions, such as Portugal and Spain, and those that occurred outside Europe that never went beyond the phase of a political movement. Fascist movements emerged in various parts of the world, and in Brazil we had an authentic fascist movement: integralism, which emerged in 1932 by the modernist Plínio Salgado, inspired by Italian fascism. Currently, neo-integralists constitute one of the several far-right movements that supported the Bolsonaro government, alongside traditionalists, neo-Nazis, Catholics, monarchists, nostalgists of the military dictatorship, anarcho-capitalists, evangelical fundamentalists, among others.

Fernando Sarti Ferreira and Rosa Rosa Gomes (2021) present three authors – Umberto Eco, João Bernardo, and Robert Paxton – to ground key ideas that they consider structural to fascist movements, emphasizing similarities in their interpretations, rather than the important differences among such movements.

For Umberto Eco, an Italian intellectual, in his 1995 text *Ur-Fascism*, fascism is not uniform or monolithic in any meaningful sense. Fascism relies on a series of ideas, often contradictory, and lacks consistency in its thinking. Filled with contradictions and structured confusion, in fascism, the apparent chaos was generated by the movement itself. Eco listed 14 typical characteristics of fascism, which are not necessarily present in every historical manifestation of the movement: a) the cult of tradition, which often combines contradictory belief systems and practices to obscure and hinder the advancement of knowledge; b) the selective rejection of capitalist modernity, as

fascisms choose which parts of modernity suit their purposes; the cult of action for action's sake, accompanied by anti-intellectualism – for fascists, the crucial thing is to act and resolve beyond consequences and means used; thinking and reflection are problematic for fascists; c) the rejection of criticism, as disagreement is seen as betrayal, making rational discussion impossible; d) racism, as all forms of diversity in society are rejected and consensus arises from the fear of difference; e) nationalism as exclusive opposition to the foreigner, mobilizing a sense of national humiliation against enemies; f) perpetual war, even as a motto for life; g) elitism, which creates a social hierarchy in which the fascist sees themselves, their people, and their nation as superior; h) the cult of heroism and death, as fascism educates for heroic death and for a “revolution” that is actually a restoration of order (Ferreira; Gomes, 2021).

Fascism is sexist and homophobic. The result is contempt for women and condemnation of any sexual orientation other than heterosexuality. Due to the difficulty of performing on the battlefield of perpetual war and heroism, fascists project their will to power onto sexual matters (Ferreira; Gomes, 2021).

The homogenization of the people and their unification around a common will is the penultimate characteristic; the last is coarse and impoverished language. To prevent any kind of critical reflection, it is necessary to limit both the complexity of thought and the repertoire as much as possible (Ferreira; Gomes, 2021).

The second author used by Ferreira and Gomes (2021) is the Portuguese intellectual João Bernardo, in his book *Labirintos do Fascismo* (Labyrinths of Fascism). This author highlights other elements in his analysis of various fascisms. The first is the idea that fascism is “a revolt of order”¹, as it aims to preserve capitalism through a revolutionary form that is reactionary in content. The second feature refers to the plasticity of fascism, as one of the most ambiguous political forms. Fascism triumphs when “[...] the left has been crushed, defeated, and incorporated into the order without, however, the social problems that generated resentment and helplessness having been resolved, which causes the masses to move toward fascism”².

Robert Paxton, in his book *The Anatomy of Fascism*, is the last thinker cited by Ferreira and Gomes (2021). The first element Paxton points out to understand fascism

involves the conditions that make the rise to power of this movement possible:

the development of mass politics, which is a phenomenon of capitalism that began in the late 19th century with the democratization of European states; a mature, divided socialist left that disillusioned its base, failing to solve immediate material problems or postponing revolution; widespread fear of communism among the middle and upper bourgeoisie; the crisis of liberal institutions (Ferreira; Gomes, 2021, p. 129).³

Fascism rises to power through these preconditions and through the positions expressed by different social groups regarding the same. While fascism contributes to the crisis of liberal and democratic institutions, which enables its ascent to power, it does not create this crisis. In addition to the institutional crisis, support from conservative social sectors is required. As a movement, fascism does not always become a party, and once in power, it must transform into a regime (Ferreira; Gomes, 2021).

Based on the reading of these three authors, Ferreira and Gomes (2021) developed the following systematization. Fascism is a phenomenon of imperialist capitalism characterized by being a mass political movement that mobilizes new forms of communication to stir political agitation: currently through social media, and in the 1920s and 1930s through cinema and advertising. This movement gains space in contexts of social and economic crisis, collapse of the left, and frustration primarily among the middle classes that also affects workers: “this resentment is mobilized through a series of scapegoats: the Jew, the Black person, the woman, the foreigner, but above all, and this is common to all fascisms, the communist threat. Anti-communism is central to these movements” (Ferreira; Gomes, 2021, p.130)⁴.

These authors highlight certain general characteristics that they extracted from historical experiences that can be applied to the present context: pack behavior; irrational discourse and practice, which nonetheless is based on half-truths; opportunism.

This presentation of the general characteristics of fascism and the synthesis of ideas from the three authors – Umberto Eco, João Bernardo, and Robert Paxton – as developed by Ferreira and Gomes (2021), is justified in a context of antifascist

education. Didactically, we could consider each characteristic as a potentially fascistizing element. Curriculum development could be guided by practices and pedagogical policies opposed to any fascistizing element present in both school daily life and the broader social setting. These “descriptive definitions”, criticized by Armando Boito Jr. (2021), play a fundamental role in antifascist education.

Armando Boito Jr. (2021, p.3) argues for the theoretical legitimacy of a general concept of fascism that transcends the particularities of original fascism, whether German or Italian, based on authors such as Palmiro Togliatti and Nicos Poulantzas. This author criticizes the definitions that he calls descriptive, of an empiricist nature and questions intellectuals, with the aim of arriving at a general characterization, historians and intellectuals, motivated by the objective of arriving at a general characterization of fascism, discriminate a list of characteristic attributes of the phenomenon, for example, Umberto Eco and Robert O. Paxton: “in the end, the concept thus obtained serves very little as an analytical tool – each historical phenomenon considered will always exhibit part, and not the whole, of the attributes contained in the concept”⁵.

Contrary to these descriptive definitions, the definition from Togliatti and Poulantzas uses Marxist State theory to characterize fascism – the State as organizer of class domination, democracy and dictatorship as State forms, etc. – alongside empirical data on political phenomena to reach a theoretical and synthetic definition of what is essential to the phenomenon, in order to serve as a clarifying guide for the analysis of fascism (Boito, 2021, p.3). These definitions converge on one point: “fascism is a dictatorship whose political regime is a reactionary mass regime” (p.3)⁶, which Boito (2021) modifies into the following definition:

Fascism, in general, is a reactionary mass movement rooted in the intermediate classes of capitalist social formations. In original fascism, the social base was composed mainly of small proprietors, the petty bourgeoisie; in 21st-century Brazilian neofascism, this social base consists mainly of the middle class and, particularly, the upper middle class (Boito, 2021, p.5)⁷.

Boito (2021) states that in many countries, fascist and neofascist movements did not aim to attain or participate in governmental power, and in those where they did,

they did not establish a fascist dictatorship. But in all countries where fascism came to power, it did not represent the interests of the intermediate classes from which it originated – the petty bourgeoisie and the middle class. For this author, both fascism and neofascism serve fractions of the bourgeoisie without becoming passively manipulable instruments of it. In original fascism, the predominantly petty-bourgeois fascist movement was co-opted by monopoly capital. In neofascism, predominantly middle class, it is co-opted by international capital and the fraction of the Brazilian bourgeoisie aligned with it.

According to Boito (2021), there is no fascist dictatorship in Brazil, but rather a fascist movement and ideology that threaten bourgeois democracy alongside the current political correlation of forces. Brazilian neofascism arose from both a long-standing and recent slaveholding past, “[...] top-down political changes, such as those in 1930 and 1985, the instability of the democratic regime, the tradition of authoritarian thought, and the significant presence of the middle class as a distinct social force – sometimes progressive, sometimes conservative – in national political history [...]” (Boito, 2021, p.9)⁸.

To conclude this overview of fascist characteristics, justified from a didactic standpoint, we cite Secco’s (2021) reflections, which reiterate some persistent traits of fascism that are also present in many right-wing movements and non-fascist regimes. Fascism is corporate and essentially mobilizing. It was antisemitic, but Bolsonarism presents itself as evangelical and pro-Israel. It was sexist, yet it appeared in non-sexist societies. It glorified violence, defended a state-directed economy like socialism, and was nationalist: “[...] but in most fascist countries, which were peripheral or semi-peripheral, which was rhetoric and never truly meant a real defense of national sovereignty” (Secco, 2021, p.136)⁹. Fascism was totalitarian, destroyed democratic institutions, but could coexist with them. It was anti-liberal, “but liberals accepted its rise within the State itself, as happened with Mussolini, Salazar, and Hitler, though not with Franco” (Secco, 2021, p.136)¹⁰.

According to Demian Melo (2020), Bolsonarism is a fascist phenomenon that brings together various currents and catalyzes multiple far-right factions. As a mass

phenomenon, it brings together several counterrevolutionary currents that supported the Bolsonaro government. Regarding its ideology, the author cites: a) the role that historical revisionism of the period of the military dictatorship, in order to exercise a mythical function, occupies in Bolsonarist ideology. It is precisely this mythical function that denies the existence of the military dictatorship; b) the traditional topic of Brazilian conservatism incorporated into the ideology of Bolsonarism – “the cult of the Portuguese medievalism, with Brazil itself understood as one of its achievements”. Here, other cultural matrices in Brazil’s social formation are silenced (Melo, 2020, p.27); c) populism, defined by the presence of a charismatic leader; d) anti-intellectualism and appeal to conspiracy theories. These elements justify attacks on schools, universities, and scientific institutions, as well as their professionals, as is the case with initiatives such as *Escola Sem Partido* (Non-Partisan School). In fascism, science or the professional press cannot override the opinion of the fascist leader, and are thus seen as spaces dominated by the “globalist left” and part of a conspiracy against the leader and fascism; e) the cult of violence against enemies; f) ultranationalism or the nationalist component embedded in its discourse, in the green-and-yellow colors and the shirt of the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF), which represents nothing more than “economic subordination and servitude to the hegemonic power of 21st-century capitalism” (Melo, 2020, p.30).

Bolsonarism, as Brazilian neofascism, is unlikely to dissipate easily with the return to power of the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT) leader Luís Inácio Lula da Silva. Understanding and operationally characterizing this neofascism is crucial in the struggle against the fascistization of Brazilian society, especially since one of its political agendas targets the educational sphere under the banner of fighting ideological indoctrination in Brazilian schools. Thus, antifascist education, as anti-Bolsonarist education, must deconstruct this supposed fight against ideological indoctrination, which has been reversed by contemporary neofascists to allow fascistizing elements to proliferate in schools without curricular resistance or action by antifascist educators.

When Lincoln Secco (2021) states that fascism is an expression of capitalism,

we must relate this to the fact that fascism emerges in contexts of deep crisis, offering the society answers – even if reactionary, conservative, authoritarian, and violent ones. If capitalism, in order to survive and continue accumulating amid its systemic crises, aligns itself with fascisms and/or neofascisms, such affinity allows us to emphasize that antifascist education, or broader social antifascism, is also anti-capitalist education. And in present times, marked by the proliferation of neoliberal capitalism, the antifascist struggle is categorically anti-neoliberal. However, before reflecting on antifascist education, the “elective affinity” between neoliberalism and neofascism is the focus of the next section.

Neoliberalism and neofascism: birds of a feather

According to Luiz Filgueiras and Graça Druck (2019), the new right and the far right captured the resentment and anger of the “losers” of globalized capitalism – feelings born from unemployment, poverty, and the precarious living conditions – and redirected them toward imaginary enemies such as liberal democracy. Neofascism grew in the context of the failure of classical liberalism and social democracy to offer alternatives to ultraneoliberalism and its social consequences. Thus, there is an “[...] elective affinity between neoliberalism, as an expression of the interests of financial capital – a doctrine/ideology, economic policy, and type of rationality – and the current rise of the far right (ultimately, neofascism)” (Filgueiras; Duck, 2019. p. 2)¹¹.

Liana Barradas and Gabriel Beltrão (2023) reinforce this idea of an elective affinity between neoliberalism and neofascism in a context where both engage in a symbiotic, ambiguous, and opportunistic relationship:

[...] at times using it to pressure the political systems of democratic countries toward increased authoritarianism and the advancement of their agendas (see the case of French ‘Macronism’); at other times acquiescing, if not blatantly supporting neofascist political forces, as in the Brazilian case, sealing the symbiosis between them (Barradas; Beltrão, 2023, p. 458)¹².

These authors warn that they do not consider fascism a phenomenon directly derived from a stage of capitalist development or from a scenario of economic crisis. However, they argue, based on their theoretical references (for example, Poulantzas,

2021), that in current capitalism, “[...] there is a tendency, not a necessity, toward the emergence of far-right movements – which may assume fascist characteristics – and toward the intensification of the authoritarianism inherent to the capitalist State, even within its liberal-democratic form” (Barradas; Beltrão, 2023, p.458)¹³.

For Octávio Ianni (1998, p. 112), the conditions and ingredients of Nazifascism are recreated under neoliberalism, which “[...] entails the increasing administration of the activities and ideas of individuals and the collective”¹⁴. Neoliberalism, as both practice and ideology, wages war on socialism and social democracy, a fierce fight against anything that is, or resembles, the “social”: it aims to alter attitudes, habits, procedures, expectations, ideals, and institutions to maximize space for private initiative, the market, corporations, conglomerates, and enterprise. This scenario constitutes a factory of contradictions, tensions, and fragmentations, in which subaltern classes, groups, subclasses, pauperism, structural unemployment, and lumpenization are produced and reproduced. This same factory continues to be a producer of Nazi-fascist ideologies and practices: “the same neoliberal war against social democracy and socialism, by aggravating and generalizing tensions, contradictions, and social struggles, fosters the manufacture and spread of Nazi-fascist ideologies, organizations, and practices” (Ianni, 1998, p. 113)¹⁵.

In this sense, global capitalism, by fermenting neoliberalism, also ferments Nazifascism, which can be understood as “[...] an extreme and exacerbated product of the same dominant social forces in the factory of global society managed under neoliberal molds. A factory in which inequalities, tensions, and contradictions are manufactured and remanufactured [...]” (Ianni, 1998, p. 115)¹⁶. Matheus de Carvalho Barros (2020, p. 147) states that “neoliberal capitalism creates and reproduces circumstances and environments conducive to the emergence of authoritarian, reactionary, and neofascist movements”¹⁷.

Brazil served as a global necropolitical laboratory, for even after independence, it preserved a colonial logic against its own people—a government exercising a kind of “internal colonialism” against its dispossessed population. Safatle argues that such explanations help us understand the ruling classes’ adherence to the fascist agenda

as part of their strategic interests. However, this is not sufficient to explain the striking popular adherence to this project, especially in the present. Without a more complete analysis of the phenomenon, we settle for “deficient explanations” that attribute popular adherence to fascism to the supposed deficiencies of its agents: barbarism, moral failings, ignorance, the masses’ inability to act in their own interest, etc. (Safatle, 2023).

In recent years, explanations have revolved around moral deficiencies – hate speech, cruelty, and resentment toward new class mobilities; cognitive deficits – religious blindness, obscurantism, fake news, cultural backwardness; or psychological deficits – resentment, death drive worship, and so on. These explanations safeguard our moral and intellectual superiority rather than offer reliable tools for analysis and action (Safatle, 2023).

The author initially questions those who are scandalized by the use of the term fascism as lacking analytical power and reiterates that we cannot expect the exact same historical features of fascism to reappear in the present. That does not mean the concept should be analytically forbidden. He defends using the term fascism to name what haunts us, to point out real risks and trends that may gradually emerge in the social totality, especially in countries that historically experienced strong fascist movements. Such movements suggest that, at a certain point, there is no neoliberalism without the continuous and dangerous emergence of fascism (Safatle, 2023).

In this 2023 article, Safatle begins his discussion by highlighting the “structural factors of Brazilian state violence.” The country was born out of a slaveholding export-oriented plantation economy in the Americas, and before becoming a settlement colony, it was a production hub that made massive use of slave labor (Safatle, 2023).

Safatle stresses that colonial dynamics are grounded in a highly resilient “ontological distinction”, which remains as a socioeconomic form even after colonialism and is a key element in the social indifference that characterizes fascism. This distinction consolidates a system that divides two regimes of subjectivation: one that allows some subjects to be recognized as people, and another that reduces subjects to things. Those recognized as people enjoy recognized rights, State protection, legal standing, mourning, and public expressions of loss (Safatle, 2023).

This colonial—necropolitical—dynamic serves class interest preservation strategies, whereby the state acts as protector toward certain classes and as predator toward others. It is within this normalization of state violence that we can find fertile ground for the development and rapid growth of national fascism, for this violence strengthens, on the one hand, the continuous militarization of society. A society organized around bureaucratic massacres and police slaughters aimed at reminding certain population segments that they are “killable without legal consequence”, justified by an imaginary of constant threat to “law-abiding citizens”. This justification “requires elevating fear to the status of a central political affect” (Safatle, 2023)¹⁸.

Brazil’s specificity in the current resurgence of fascism lies not only in its “structural conditions” — that is, state violence resulting from the persistence of colonial capitalist social structures, in which the ontological distinction between subjects from the slave society and the brutality of primitive accumulation still prevails — but also in the set of “contextual conditions.” In the Brazilian case, “it is linked to the exhaustion of the New Republic and the consolidation of a ‘conservative revolution’ dynamic tied to the rise of openly authoritarian neoliberalism” (Safatle, 2023, n.p.)¹⁹.

Another contextual element is the retreat of the Brazilian left’s transformative horizon, which, among other consequences, led to “[...] the consolidation of authoritarian neoliberalism as a ‘revolutionary’ alternative to the closure of the historical cycle of national pacts and its disappointing outcomes”²⁰. Authoritarian neoliberalism, in association with fascism, presents itself as an alternative rupture marked by strong popular and insurrectionary adherence. This adherence is politically explained by a discourse of strengthening freedom and autonomy as a form of materialized emancipation (Safatle, 2023, n.p.). Thus, this neoliberalism promises to establish freedom in the country. But such freedom appears primarily as self-ownership and entrepreneurship as a response to a reality in which capitalism allows no room for macrostructures of protection. Attempts to reissue the social pacts that once made the welfare state possible have proven unsustainable because the working class can no longer build the strength needed to demand compensation in the face of the irreversible process of primitive accumulation and income concentration (Safatle, 2023, n.p.).

The recent struggle to revoke the current high school reform, enacted by decree in 2017, is connected to the social and educational consequences directly linked to that reform. By focusing on entrepreneurship and life projects as structuring principles for youth education, the *Lei 13.415/17* (Law 13.415/17) not only erects the formative project of this authoritarian neoliberalism as described by Safatle but, above all, reduces social emancipation and freedom to an individualistic entrepreneurship capable of solving all social ills affecting individuals, such as inequality, poverty, violence, and total abandonment.

Safatle (2023) highlights the standard neoliberal response, which is the Bolsonaroist response and lies at the heart of the high school counter-reform currently being implemented. Instead of creating macrostructures of protection, the illusion is reinforced that individuals are self-governing nuclei of deliberation and struggle, armed only with their merits. According to this logic, the burden of failure and stagnation falls on individuals, just as:

[...] schooling would be transferred to individuals (via homeschooling), health to individuals (as seen during the pandemic, when the state offered emergency aid instead of strengthening the SUS - Unified Health System), and security to individuals (who can and should carry weapons). Likewise, all obligations of solidarity with more vulnerable groups are gradually annulled, for they are tacitly understood as obstacles to the free occurrence of individual struggles for survival (Safatle, 2023, n.p.).²¹

The contemporary merging of fascism and neoliberalism uses the discourse of freedom as self-ownership and individual empowerment to disconnect the state from compensatory policies and create the illusion of a more equitable reality. If freedom is something one possesses, then one must simply enjoy one's goods, engage in entrepreneurship, and generate more property. Thus, the discourse of entrepreneurship as a means of social emancipation is reinforced. And emancipation becomes a quest with only one path: the path of competition and rivalry (Safatle, 2023, n.p.). In contrast to this reality, Safatle insists that freedom is not a predicate applicable to individuals but to social bodies:

There can be no free individuals in unfree societies, especially because freedom is not a behavioral disposition or a thought structure but a system of

actions and social 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, of rivalry, and of viewing all experience as capital into which one invests (Safatle, 2023, s/p).²²

Safatle states that neoliberalism may intensify a crisis by pushing subjects toward reactive and defensive responses, for “[...] neoliberalism is a mode of managing psychic suffering, of displacing social contradictions onto individual realms, as if it were solely up to individuals and their supposed powerlessness to bear responsibility for their inhibitions, symptoms, and anxieties” (Safatle, 2023, n.p.)²³. Brazil is a privileged site for the intensification of psychic crises “which provide an important element for consolidating adherence to the fusion between fascism and neoliberalism” (Safatle, 2023, n.p.)²⁴.

Fascist or neofascist education consists of authoritarian and violent formative policies that proliferate militarism, fanaticism, racism, the necropolitics of Black men and Black women, dissident bodies, women, and the less profitable or underprivileged classes. Even if it is not yet possible to directly impose a fascist agenda in schools, at the very least there is a circulation of strategies to prepare the ground by criminalizing and censoring any ideology, practice, or orientation within the school that stands in opposition to, for example, exacerbated nationalism, Christian conservatism, compulsory heterosexuality, market and political fundamentalism. It is in the fight against this circulation that antifascist education must be built.

Outlines of an antifascist education

Douglas Barboza (2022) analyzed the bases upon which a process of fascistization has been constructed in Brazil, whose greatest expression occurred with the rise of Jair Bolsonaro to power. By highlighting the conjunctures of economic crisis, with their political and ideological components as enablers of the genesis and development of diverse forms and expressions of far-right movements, governments, ideologies, and political leaders – whether fascist in nature or not – he describes the

Brazilian conjuncture in the following manner: the destructive scenario of capitalism and of the world economic crisis is expressed dramatically in Brazil with the ascent of a government that meets the aspirations of capital through chaos, disorganization, and the implementation of different forms of violence. In a country marked by dependent capitalism and by the maintenance of autarkic, oligarchic, and seigneurial elements, democracy, constituted only superficially, opened the way for a process of fascistization of the State and of society:

Violence, prejudice, dehumanization, information manipulation, the obscurantism of values, the delegitimization of science, the inhibition of freedom, and the encouragement of the disarticulation of the working class are elements that are combined with an ultraliberalism in the economy and a political ideology of fascist stamp (fermented by the rejection of democratic institutions, by the radical anti-communist and pseudo-nationalist discourse) (Barboza, 2022, p. 4).²⁵

The above quotation synthesizes the elements that must be combated by antifascist education which, in some manner, are present in the social fabric and can reach current pedagogical practices. The critique of neoliberalism, the awareness of the risks of fascist dissemination, and the political intentionalities that traverse the proliferation of scientific denialism, obscurantism, and anti-communism may constitute urgent themes in a counter-offensive of critical and emancipatory education. Nevertheless, schools need to confront the current basic-education curriculum which, beyond constituting itself violently in its normalizing, standardized, scientistic, European, white, and heteronormative implementation, does not directly combat all the processes of prejudice, discrimination, and dehumanization that become visible on a daily basis.

Eduardo Rebuá (2019) emphasizes that the Brazilian process of fascistization is the result of the fascistization of the expanded State, whose specific characteristics can be understood as historical marks of postponed, top-down, or unresolved issues:

The hatred of the poor, made explicit in heightened socio-spatial segregation, in the daily genocide of Black youth, in the social legitimation of massacres and social cleansings carried out by militias, and in the country's leading position in lynchings and murders of LGBTs as well as of women; the unexperienced and unshared mourning and trauma of the civil-military dictatorship, perceptible in

the boycott of the Truth Commission and in political initiatives of historical reparation for the victims of the “years of lead”; the adherence of fundamentalist religious sectors linked to prosperity theology—especially evangelical churches—with strong social, media, cultural, and political dissemination, taking the United States as their primordial reference (Rebuá, 2019).²⁶

These “unresolved issues,” socially speaking – or issues that were left for the helpless and oppressed individual to resolve – are reclaimed by neoliberalism and its educational project under the banner of entrepreneurship and the effectiveness of socio-emotional competences. Thus, the humiliated, discriminated, and financially forsaken individual must “entrepreneurialize” his or her socio-emotional competences in order to attain success in social life. Neoliberal education turns the struggle for a dignified life and for rights into an individualistic question. Failure in this solitary endeavor can be appropriated by fascist education, which lists as causes of individual lack of success certain “scapegoats,” such as democracy, communism, social programs, social impurity, bad morals, left-wing parties, discussions of gender and sexuality in schools, religious diversity, among others.

The form and function of education have been captured by the progress of capital which, in times of expansion of social rights, has been reinforced by new educational-management technologies (Catini, 2019). The education of capital stands opposed to the very notion of education as a right and transforms the issue of human rights into a kind of goal to be reached through individual merit.

In this context, the principal foundation of an antifascist education is the recovery of the idea of education as the appropriation of human creations and as a human right belonging to any social being, irrespective of culturally marked diversity and difference.

A second antifascist pedagogical foundation, no less urgent than the first, is the reclaiming of education – understood as cultural appropriation and a transformative force of the world – from the domination of ultra-reactionary social groups who use education as a political tool to expand ultraconservative messages and to build militant loyalty. Through schools, there is submission to a moral and ideological panic that creates an artificial opposition between discipline and pedagogy, masking the true

objective, which is to promote authoritarianism and inhibit emancipatory cultural appropriation” (Cara, 2019, p. 31). Therefore, in this scenario, education must become an instrument of struggle and freedom against barbarism via the right to education.

The process of “de-barbarization”, as proposed by Adorno in 1968, is the most urgent issue for education, as identified by Sinésio Ferraz Bueno (2021). Adorno (2003) refers to barbarism as primitive aggressiveness, primitive hatred, or the destructive impulse that threatens all of civilization. For him, emancipation must be embedded in educational thought and practice. Preventing Auschwitz from happening again, for this thinker, is the fundamental role of education centered on critical self-reflection.

The massification of social media amplifies the reproduction of socially rooted prejudices, militant intolerances, and total violence across all social spaces. School is not immune to the resurgence of a climate conducive to the return of barbarism. Social media maximizes an education geared toward fascism. They must be used instead as antifascist tools: in addition to legal mechanisms to hold people accountable and criminalize hate speech, defamation, and fake news, a set of combative antifascist social networks can also be constructed and disseminated.

In these terms, an antifascist curriculum must oppose practices of discrimination, prejudice, and dehumanization in all aspects of education, from instruction to interpersonal relationships among students, teachers, and any participants in school interactions. Thus, the curriculum could halt ongoing processes of barbarization, such as the offensive against “gender ideology”, the alleged fight against ideological indoctrination by advocates of the *Escola Sem Partido* (Non-Partisan School) movement, and the implementation of the current counter-reform of high school, which acts to eliminate content from the Humanities, Arts, Natural Sciences, and Physical Education in favor of an entrepreneurial education. Every educational process is intentional, formative, and socializing. Antifascist socialization is urgent and demands political decision-making from education professionals in general.

If fascism – as defined by Umberto Eco – is generically characterized by the cult

of a tradition of contradictory beliefs, sexism, homophobia, anti-intellectualism, rejection of criticism, racism, a nationalism that humiliates the enemy, and the glorification of heroism, death, and perpetual war, then antifascist processes must prioritize: respect and empathy for diversity and difference; the valorization of a culture of peace, where heroism, if it exists, is defined as mediation and the elimination of various forms of individual and social violence; a curiosity for multidisciplinary, reflective, and critical knowledge; and the rejection of meritocracy, entrepreneurship, and excessive individualism, which, as devices of neoliberalism, not only hinder all the aforementioned processes but also justify the permanent war of all against all for survival in the capitalist world.

To achieve this type of antifascist education, the knowledge from the Humanities, Natural Sciences, and the Arts is indispensable – especially to unveil the contradictions, ignorance, vulgar language, and the social character of the hierarchies that sustain fascisms. In addition, education must foster positive affectivity over the culture of violence that dominates various spaces of sociability.

If fascism, as a mass politics gaining strength in contexts of social and economic crisis and social frustration that affects workers, in the terms proposed by Ferreira and Gomes (2021), then one of the essential contents of an antifascist education is the effective integration of sociological, scientific, artistic, and philosophical knowledge in basic education – especially those that analyze and critique the capitalist system and its current neoliberal phase as generators of social misery and reinforcers of capital accumulation at the expense of social solidarity, critical reflexivity, and the collective resistance potential of the working class. If fascism is a reactionary means to preserve capitalism, as João Bernardo argues, then an anti-capitalist education becomes equally urgent.

An education that fosters the recognition of differences would become a tool to combat the spread of deeply rooted social prejudices that sustain fascism. Such dissemination occurs primarily through social media platforms, where, under the pretext of defending freedom of expression, users and owners refuse to participate in any regulation or control over the violent content that is produced and instantly

disseminated.

The current counter-reform promoted by corporate education reformers may be regarded as a policy paving fertile ground for fascism, since, according to Secco (2021), fascism is the rawest expression of capitalism, or, in the words of Safatle, there is no neoliberalism without the emergence of fascism. The ongoing high school reform in the country has eliminated the requirement to teach Sociology and Philosophy; Chemistry and Physics; Arts and Physical Education, while also destabilizing the presence of all traditional school subjects in the curriculum, except for Portuguese Language, Mathematics, and English Language. To include “attractive” subjects in the infamous “flexible” curriculum such as Life Project, entrepreneurship, and other invented “subjects” that have no direct link to the traditional fields of scientific knowledge, the recently revised curricula have even reduced the teaching hours of exact sciences. This reduction, tied to the increase in the time students must stay in school, aligns with the neoliberal project for the working class: the formation of an uncritical, cheap, self-sufficient, vulnerable, and reserve labor force.

Neoliberal education is neither anti-fascist nor anti-barbaric. On the contrary, the ideals of entrepreneurship, competitiveness, meritocracy, and self-sufficiency in contexts of inequality, exploitation, and violence contribute to social barbarization. The social fear generated by the precariousness of globalization and the collapse of state interventionist economic policy under the neoliberal alliance model is met with a dissolution of obligations toward social solidarity.

Capitalist or neoliberal education, in this sense, has an “elective affinity” with a barbaric or neofascist education.

In a context of expanding capitalist production, it becomes necessary to devise new forms of shaping the subjectivity of labor in order to generate consensus favorable to the demands of capitalism. It is in this context that the discourse of entrepreneurship gains ground and operates to naturalize and promote consent to a higher degree of expropriation and exploitation (Fávero De Oliveira, 2023): “Introducing entrepreneurship into educational work is the solution for teaching through practice that it is natural to adhere to competitiveness in order to survive: an excellent method

for social pacification through individual assimilation of ideology” (Catini, 2019, p. 37)²⁷.

The discourse of entrepreneurship conceals the structural and capitalist causes of exploitation and inequality and, when coupled with meritocratic rhetoric, attributes to each social subject's individual actions the sole reasons for their failures or successes in social competition. Therefore, entrepreneurial, or rather neoliberal, education not only creates the social conditions for the emergence of reactionary, far-right, and even fascist movements, which feed on crises and the resentments of individuals, but also immerses society in an atmosphere that hinders social solidarity, critical reflection, emancipation, and social transformation. Once again, we may cite Octávio Ianni (1998), in his argument that neoliberalism recreates the conditions and ingredients of Nazifascism.

For Catini, contemporary education, focused on entrepreneurship, managed by private entities, and mimicking corporate management, annihilates autonomy and formative experience. This type of education projects barbarism that lies at its core. The imperative resistance to such barbaric education is linked to the construction of autonomous processes of struggle and formation whose way out lies in the creation of social relations not based on individualism, competition, and heteronomy. Subversive practice must be the nucleus of education, as it represents the only way to reject the premises of barbarism. For that, it must be watchful not only of content but above all of the social form it takes, considering that the capitalist mode of education has the power to impose itself on everything and everyone (Catini, 2019).

One of the main challenges of antifascism is to overcome the traditional, conservative, racist, sexist, misogynistic, LGBTQ-phobic, exclusivist, classist, and colonial character of Brazilian education. This character, in and of itself, already facilitates the implementation of fascist policies in Brazilian schools, since fascism presupposes “[...] a relational atmosphere that establishes objectification and, therefore, blocks the possibility of recognition between human consciousnesses; this means that fascism takes the form of radical evil, as it neutralizes at its root the dialectical movement of self-consciousness” (Bueno, 2021, p. 234)²⁸. Fascism feeds off “[...] not only emotionally projective schemas that distort the Other and destructive

impulses directed at social minorities, but also resentful postures that turn against the formative potential of culture” (Bueno, 2022, p. 94)²⁹.

In terms of school content, Safatle’s considerations (2023) offer a framework that can be directed toward Humanities classes, particularly Sociology and Philosophy, but may also permeate the entire basic education curriculum. An antifascist education must analyze the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism and expose the mobilizing discourse that strengthens the idea of freedom as self-ownership, while advancing the idea of freedom and autonomy as tools for emancipation.

If capitalism does not accept social protection, the freedom of entrepreneurship cannot be sustained in real-world practice. The neoliberal response that emphasizes the individual as the agent of their own survival must be dismantled. Schools must debate Brazilian state violence and lay bare the colonial and necropolitical dynamics that distinguish people considered subjects from people deemed as things, and thus as killable. It is not only state violence that must be denaturalized – including its administrative forms and police massacres – but also its protection of predatory social classes.

Final considerations

An education based on entrepreneurship and the pursuit of forming resilient citizens, enterprises e self-coaches demonstrates that current educational policy reinstates the pragmatic alliance between neoliberalism and fascism, in which the ruling class, seeking to preserve its capital accumulation project, sees no ethical or civilizational issue in aligning itself with formative practices of social barbarization.

If education for entrepreneurship is central to the current high school counter-reform, we may then infer that this counter-reform, in order to sustain the neoliberal subjectivation that enables capital accumulation processes, is unconcerned with the risk of fostering potential formative processes of barbarization.

An antifascist education is one that promotes affectivity, a culture of peace, recognition of diversity and differences; it is anti-racist, scientific, artistic, sociological,

philosophical, corporal, humanized, supportive, and critical-reflective. Not only will this type of education materialize with the strength of the school, but the school can take on this urgent challenge and invite other educational spaces to become partners in this endeavor. Without an anti-racist, scientific, anti-LGBTphobic, anti-sexist, anti-misogynistic, anti-aporophobic, anti-necropolitical, anti-neoliberal and anti-capitalist education, the materialization of an anti-fascist education is not possible.

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Notas

¹ Original: “uma revolta da ordem”

² Original: “[...] a esquerda foi esmagada, derrotada e incorporada à ordem sem, no entanto, que os problemas sociais que geraram ressentimentos e desamparo tenham sido resolvidos, isso faz com que as massas se movam em direção ao fascismo” (Ferreira; Gomes, 2021, p. 127).

³ Original: “desenvolvimento de uma política de massas, que é um fenômeno do capitalismo iniciado no final do século XIX, com a democratização dos Estados europeus; uma esquerda socialista já madura, dividida e que desiludiu as suas bases, não solucionando os problemas materiais imediatos ou adiando a revolução; medo disseminado do comunismo nas camadas médias e alta da burguesia; crise das instituições liberais” (Ferreira; Gomes, 2021, p. 129).

⁴ Original: “esse ressentimento é mobilizado através de uma série de bodes expiatórios: o judeu, o negro, a mulher, o estrangeiro, mas, sobretudo, e isso é comum a todos os fascismos, a ameaça comunista. O anticomunismo é central nesses movimentos” (Ferreira; Gomes, 2021, p.130).

⁵ Original: “no final das contas, o conceito assim obtido serve muito pouco como instrumento analítico – cada fenômeno histórico considerado sempre apresentará parte, e não a totalidade dos atributos contidos no conceito”.

⁶ Original: “o fascismo é uma ditadura cujo regime político é um regime reacionário de massa”.

⁷ Original: “O fascismo, em geral, é um movimento reacionário de massa enraizado em classes intermediárias das formações sociais capitalistas. No fascismo original, a base social era composta majoritariamente por pequenos proprietários, a pequena burguesia; no neofascismo brasileiro do século XXI, essa base social é composta majoritariamente pela classe média e, particularmente, pela alta classe média” (Boito, 2021, p.5).

⁸ Original: “[...] as mudanças políticas efetuadas pelo alto, como em 1930 e 1985, a instabilidade do regime democrático, a tradição do pensamento autoritário e a significativa presença da classe média como força social distinta – ora progressista, ora conservadora – na história política nacional [...]” (Boito, 2021, p.9).

⁹ Original: “[...], mas na maioria dos países fascistas, que eram periféricos ou semiperiféricos, aquilo era uma retórica e não significou jamais uma defesa real da soberania nacional” (Secco, 2021, p. 136)

¹⁰ Original: “mas os liberais aceitaram sua ascensão no interior do próprio Estado, como aconteceu com Mussolini, Salazar e Hitler, embora não com Franco” (Secco, 2021, p. 136)

¹¹ Original: “[...] afinidade eletiva, entre o neoliberalismo, enquanto expressão dos interesses do capital financeiro - doutrina/ideologia, política econômica e tipo de racionalidade -, e a atual ascensão da extrema-direita (no limite, o neofascismo)” (Filgueiras; Duck, 2019. p. 2)

¹² Original: “[...] ora se utilizando dele para pressionar o sistema político dos países democráticos ao recrudescimento do autoritarismo e ao avanço da sua agenda (vide o caso do “macronismo” francês); ora

aquiescendo, quando não apoiando despudoradamente forças políticas neofascistas, como no caso brasileiro, sacramentando a simbiose entre ambos” (Barradas; Beltrão, 2023, p. 458).

¹³ Original: “[...] há uma tendência, não uma necessidade, à emergência de movimentos de extrema direita -os quais podem assumir características fascistas –e ao recrudescimento do autoritarismo inerente ao Estado capitalista, mesmo que no interior da sua forma democrático-liberal” (Barradas; Beltrão, 2023, p.458).

¹⁴ Original: “[...] implica a crescente administração das atividades e ideias de indivíduos e coletividade”.

¹⁵ Original: “a mesma guerra do neoliberalismo contra a social-democracia e o socialismo, agravando e generalizando as tensões, contradições e lutas sociais, favorece a fabricação e a generalização de ideologias, organizações e práticas nazi-fascistas” (Ianni, 1998, p. 113).

¹⁶ Original: “[...] como um produto extremo e exacerbado das mesmas forças sociais predominantes na fábrica da sociedade mundial administrada em moldes neoliberais. Uma fábrica na qual se fabricam e refabricam desigualdades, tensões e contradições [...]” (Ianni, 1998, p. 115).

¹⁷ Original: “o capitalismo neoliberal cria e reproduz circunstâncias e ambientes propícios para o surgimento de movimentos autoritários, reacionários e neofascistas”.

¹⁸ Original: “precisa elevar o medo a afeto político central” (Safatle, 2023).

¹⁹ Original: “ela está ligada ao esgotamento da Nova República e à consolidação da dinâmica de uma “revolução conservadora” vinculada à ascensão de um neoliberalismo abertamente autoritário” (Safatle, 2023).

²⁰ Original: “[...] à consolidação do neoliberalismo autoritário como alternativa “revolucionária” ao encerramento do ciclo histórico dos pactos nacionais e seu saldo decepcionante”.

²¹ Original: “[...] a escola passaria aos indivíduos (através do homeschooling), a saúde passaria aos indivíduos (como vimos na pandemia, quando o estado deu auxílios emergenciais ao invés de consolidar o sistema SUS), a segurança passaria aos indivíduos (que podem e devem andar armados). Da mesma forma, todas as obrigações de solidariedade com grupos mais vulneráveis são paulatinamente anuladas, pois tacitamente compreendidas como entraves para que a luta individual pela sobrevivência possa ocorrer de forma aberta” (Safatle, 2023, s/p).

²² Original: “Não é possível existir indivíduos livres em sociedades não-livres, até porque a liberdade não é uma disposição de conduta, nem uma estrutura de pensamento, mas um sistema de ações e práticas sociais. Só em uma sociedade livre, tal sistema de ações é possível. A noção de liberdade baseada no empreendedorismo e na livre iniciativa é simplesmente uma fraude. Empreendedorismo não é uma forma de liberdade, mas de servidão. Ele é a violência da redução de todas as relações sociais a relações de concorrência, de competição e a compreensão de toda experiência como capital no qual se investe” (Safatle, 2023, s/p).

²³ Original: “[...] o neoliberalismo é um modo de gestão de sofrimento psíquico, de deslocamento das contradições sociais para os foros individuais, como se coubesse apenas aos indivíduos e à sua pretensa impotência a responsabilidade por suas inibições, sintomas e angústias” (Safatle, 2023, s/p).

²⁴ Original: “que fornecem um elemento importante para a consolidação da adesão à junção entre fascismo e neoliberalismo” (Safatle, 2023, s/p).

²⁵ Original: “A violência, o preconceito, a desumanização, a manipulação das informações, o obscurantismo dos valores, a deslegitimação da ciência, a inibição da liberdade e o fomento à desarticulação da classe trabalhadora são elementos que são combinados com um ultraliberalismo na economia e uma ideologia política de cunho fascista (fermentada pela rejeição das instituições democráticas, pelo discurso anticomunista e pseudonacionalista radical)” (Barboza, 2022, p.4).

²⁶ Original: “O ódio ao pobre, explicitado na segregação socioespacial maiúscula, no genocídio diário de jovens negros/negras, na legitimação social das chacinhas, limpezas sociais via milícias, na liderança do país em linchamentos e assassinatos de LGBTs, assim como de mulheres; o luto e o trauma não vividos e partilhados da ditadura civil-militar, perceptíveis no boicote à Comissão da Verdade e às iniciativas políticas de reparação histórica às vítimas dos anos de chumbo; o adesismo de setores religiosos fundamentalistas e vinculados à teologia da prosperidade, com destaque para as igrejas evangélicas, com forte disseminação social, midiática, cultural e política, tendo nos Estados Unidos a referência primeva” (Rebuá, 2019, s/p).

²⁷ Original: “Introduzir empreendedorismo no trabalho educativo é a solução para ensinar pela prática que é natural aderir à competitividade para poder sobreviver: um ótimo método para a pacificação social via assimilação individual da ideologia” (Catini, 2019, p. 37).

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- ²⁸ Original: “[...] uma atmosfera relacional instauradora da coisificação, e, portanto, bloqueadora da possibilidade de reconhecimento entre as consciências humanas, isso significa que o fascismo se configura como mal radical, pois neutraliza na raiz o movimento dialético da autoconsciência” (Bueno, 2021, p. 234).
- ²⁹ Original: “[...] não apenas de esquemas emocionalmente projetivos que distorcem o Outro, e de impulsos destrutivos dirigidos contra minorias sociais, mas também de posturas ressentidas que se voltam contra os potenciais formativos da cultura” (Bueno, 2022, p. 94).