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FASCISM IN COLOMBIA: MILITARIZATION, ANTI-COMMUNISM AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE INTERNAL ENEMY

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Abstract

This writing intends to reflect on the existence of fascism in Colombia. The use of the concept is a matter of debate in academic, social and political sectors. On the one hand, there is talk of the impertinence of its use when falling into an exaggeration or anachronism; on the other hand, terms such as authoritarianism or populism are chosen. That is why we ask ourselves: is it valid to speak of fascism in Colombia? To respond, the letter is composed of two parts. The first reflects on some characteristics of fascism; it is done in the form of theses that serve for analysis and discussion. From these premises, in the second part the context of Colombia is positioned. Emphasis is placed on two elements: militarization and anti-communism as a way of building an internal enemy. The reflection concludes that fascist practices have been developed and maintained in Colombia; consequently, the use of the concept is viable and necessary.

Descriptors: Fascism; Colombia; Militarization; Anti-communism; Enemy within.

<p>FASCISMO NA COLÔMBIA: MILITARIZAÇÃO, ANTICOMUNISMO E A CONSTRUÇÃO DO INIMIGO INTERNO</p> <p>Resumo: Este escrito pretende refletir sobre a existência do fascismo na Colômbia. O uso do conceito é uma questão de debate nos setores acadêmico, social e político. Por um lado, fala-se da impertinência de seu uso ao cair em exagero ou anacronismo; por outro lado, optam-se por termos como autoritarismo ou populismo. Por isso nos perguntamos: é válido falar de fascismo na Colômbia? Para responder, a carta é composta de duas partes. A primeira reflete sobre algumas características do fascismo; é feito na forma de teses que servem para análise e discussão. A partir dessas premissas, na segunda parte se posiciona o contexto da Colômbia. A ênfase é colocada em dois elementos: a</p>	<p>FASCISMO EN COLOMBIA: MILITARIZACIÓN, ANTICOMUNISMO Y CONSTRUCCIÓN DEL ENEMIGO INTERNO</p> <p>Resumen: El presente escrito se propone reflexionar sobre la existencia del fascismo en Colombia. El uso del concepto es motivo de debate en sectores académicos, sociales y políticos. Por un lado, se habla de la impertinencia de su uso al caer en una exageración o anacronismo; por otro lado, se opta por términos como autoritarismo o populismo. Por eso nos preguntamos: ¿es válido hablar de fascismo en Colombia? Para dar respuesta, el escrito se compone de dos partes. En la primera se reflexiona sobre algunas características del fascismo; se lo hace a manera de tesis que sirven para el análisis y la discusión. Desde estas premisas, en la</p>
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<p>militarização e o anticomunismo como forma de construir um inimigo interno. A reflexão conclui que as práticas fascistas foram desenvolvidas e mantidas na Colômbia; conseqüentemente, é viável e necessário utilizar o conceito.</p> <p>Descritores: Fascismo; Colômbia; Militarização; Anticomunismo; Inimigo interno.</p>		<p>segunda parte se posiciona el contexto de Colombia. Se hace énfasis en dos elementos: la militarización y el anticomunismo como forma de construcción de enemigo interno. La reflexión concluye que sí se han gestado y se mantienen prácticas fascistas en Colombia; en consecuencia, es viable y necesario el uso del concepto.</p> <p>Descriptores: Fascismo; Colombia; Militarización; Anticomunismo; Enemigo interno.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

Talking about fascism usually brings to mind images of concentration camps from the movies. It points to a specific historical moment and geographical location: 20th-century Europe. However, the notion of fascism goes beyond this imagery. It is not limited to a historical period or a geographical location. It is a web of praxis, ideology, classification of society and also the establishment of political regimes. It has general and particular characteristics for each context.

That is why so much is said, thought and written about fascism. And no wonder. Nowadays there is talk of **neo-fascism**, **post-fascism**, **proto-fascism**, etc. It is not the intention of this text to delve into the different theoretical currents or the debate about these terms. Although it does start from a premise: the need to talk about the validity of fascism and, therefore, to understand the importance of anti-fascist struggles. As Zubiria well points out:¹

The symptoms of the return or persistence of fascism are an ethical and academic responsibility. The issue cannot be limited to a dispute over terms (neofascism, urfascism, proto-fascism, new fascism, corporate fascism, etc.), but must point to the imminent awareness of its social and political danger.¹⁽³⁰⁾

The objective of this text is to reflect on the presence of fascism in Colombia. The initial question is: is it valid to talk about fascism in Colombia? Why talk about fascism? To dive into the subject made it clear that it is not a simple task, there are no finished or defined debates. On the contrary: the debate around the questions has been the subject of theoretical, media and political

dissertations. Among the complexities, two stand out: 1) the historical and political elements of the Colombian context, especially the existence of an internal conflict that gives fascism its own characteristics. And 2) the wide use of the term. The use of the concept is so common that it is intertwined with notions such as authoritarianism, racism, xenophobia, etc. It has also been appropriated as a combative or denunciatory discourse. A situation that leads to the excessive broadening of the term and the danger, in this case, of it becoming the whole and dissolving into nothingness and abstraction.

The present reflection is not a closed dissertation; on the contrary, it is intended as a provocation for analysis of the anti-fascist struggles. Nor is it a theoretical dissertation on fascism. It is a reflective and argumentative dissertation on the question posed. From this perspective, it is not intended to apply a checklist of the characteristics or anatomy of fascism to the context of Colombia. To do so would be to limit the analysis, to forget the characteristics specific to the country and to close the retro determinative loop between theory and reality.

The text is divided into two sections. The first sets out a number of premises intended to provide a basis for the analysis of Colombia in relation to fascism. These are presented in the form of thesis, as they are not closed or definitive statements about fascism. Using the analytical framework provided by the thesis, the second part sets out to describe the context of Colombia. It delves into two elements: militarization and the configuration of the internal enemy in relation to the anti-communist struggle. These factors are interrelated and framed within the general characteristics of fascism. This analysis leads to the conclusion that fascist practices have historically developed in Colombia and continue to the present day.

THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL PREMISES ON FASCISM

The intention is not to start from a definition of fascism or a kind of list with a typology of fascism. We opt for premises, by way of a thesis, that allow us to open up the analysis to understand the Colombian case.

First

Fascism is a historical process of modernity and a developed form of capitalism. It is a product of the social antagonism typical of the dynamics of capitalism in the 20th century up to the present day. This allows us to evaluate at least two elements. Firstly, it is not possible to analyze

fascism without taking into account the material, social and subjective conditions forged by capitalism. Secondly, as De Zubiria rightly points out, “fascism will never be an anti-system tendency, it will be used to legitimize capitalism in its crises; it will always oppose any emancipatory project to restore a totalitarian capitalist modernity”.²⁽¹⁵⁾

This premise requires an understanding of the formation of Latin American States from the development of global capitalism. In particular, an understanding of the characteristics in the configuration of the Nation-State^a.

Second

Fascism is not a thing of the past. It is often believed to be an anachronistic concept or idea: **it was an interwar event, it is not the time, moment and context** and other statements that ensure that today there is no longer any place for the use of the concept. These considerations are wrong. Fascism is not a 20th-century parenthesis on a specific continent. The previous thesis allows us to reveal that, as it is part of the contradictions in the development of capitalism, its existence, readjustment or accommodation to the new social dynamics within the framework of capital is feasible. It is a question of “glimpsing, perceiving the possible forms of a 21st-century fascism, not the reproduction of interwar fascism”.³⁽³⁾

The idea of leaving fascism behind as a situation of the past is not naïve. Deep down it is a dispute over history and the understanding of the past/present. Theodor Adorno⁴ explains that the desire to leave German National Socialism **behind** is a response, among other things, to the need to continue living as a **nation**, as if nothing had happened. The Frankfurt thinker writes:

There is a will to free oneself from the past: rightly so, because it is impossible to live under its shadow, and because when guilt and violence can only be paid for with new guilt and new violence, terror has no end; wrongly so, because the past from which one would like to flee is still very much alive. National Socialism survives, and to this day we don't know if it is only as a mere ghost of what was so monstrous, or because it did not manage to die, or if the disposition to the unspeakable continues to beat as much in men as in the circumstances that surround them.⁴⁽¹⁵⁾

Forgetfulness, Adorno warns, is not an unconscious fact; it is the “overly alert” social conscience.⁴ A social process that needs to situate a past closed in time. It is the same idea of

^a This will not be the central objective of the text. We will refer to some general elements that will allow us to understand the discussion.

denial, closure or oblivion of the processes of repression experienced in 20th-century Latin America.

Therefore, the use of the concept of **fascism** is also a dispute over history. In this respect, the contributions of Reinhart Koselleck⁵ on the unnaturalness of the use or non-use of concepts are correct. We deal with this in the following thesis.

Third

The use of the concept is necessary. Currently it is being replaced by others such as populism or authoritarianism. Although it is true that there is a fine semantic line between these notions, it is important not to dilute the concept; as has been emphasized, from a historical analysis and without forgetting the social antagonisms, fascism is typical of a historical stage which, with its changes and dynamics, we continue to witness.

Today, in order to understand fascism, it is pertinent to reflect in a diachronic and synchronic way. In his contributions to the history of concepts, Koselleck highlights the need to understand concepts in both dimensions. Synchronicity refers to the present of the event and diachrony is the temporal depth at work in a current event. For Koselleck, “diachrony and synchrony are necessarily intertwined on the linguistic level. The concept has a historical impulse that leads to innovation, but also numerous aspects of discreet permanence or repetition.”⁵⁽¹⁶⁵⁾

They are not two exclusive scenarios; on the contrary, the relationship between the two allows for the revision of changes and permanence of the concept. It is a question of dialectically linking the two moments^b. The historical impulse of fascism refers us to classical fascism: its roots, context, specific temporal and geographical moment. But it also allows us to understand, synchronically, the innovations and changes in time and space.

This idea leads us to reject any attempt to assume a closed list of characteristics of classical fascism in comparison with different realities (in this case, Colombia). But, at the same time, it calls for us not to forget its historical impulse.

Fourthly

^b Koselleck takes these notions from Saussure in the development of linguistic fields. However, he clarifies that he does so as an analytical framework and not merely as a tool of language as the Swiss linguist does.

Militarism is a characteristic of fascism and, consequently, it is not compatible with pacifism. The establishment of an order, of a national status quo typical of fascism, is not possible without a military rise to power. If we analyze the historical impulse of fascism (its emergence in 20th-century Europe), we see that it is determined by the rise of war.

For Walter Benjamin,⁶ criticism of fascism implies criticism of war. In the text “On the Critique of Violence”, in the chapter on theories of German fascism, a review of Jünger’s essays written in 1930 warns that rising fascism is the cult of war of the German nation:

he wrote here: War, “eternal war”, like the much-discussed previous war, would be the highest expression of the German nation. By now it should be clear that behind eternal war hides a notion of worship, while behind the last war hides the notion of technology.^{6(50, emphasis in original)}

From this perspective, pacifism does not converge with fascism. It does not care, nor is it interested. Even its expressions are assumed as enemy. This is highlighted by Umberto Eco⁷ in the 14 symptoms of eternal fascism:

For Ur-Fascism there is no struggle for life, but rather “life for the struggle”. Pacifism is then collusion with the enemy; pacifism is bad because life is a permanent war. This, however, carries with it a Harmagedon complex: since enemies must and can be defeated, there will have to be a final battle, as a result of which the movement will gain control of the world. Such a final solution implies a successive era of peace, a Golden Age that contradicts the principle of permanent war. No fascist leader has ever managed to resolve this contradiction.⁷⁽⁹⁾

The cult of war and rejection of pacifism is not only characteristic of dictatorial regimes. Or of moments when the idea of the rule of law is annulled. It is a characteristic that can survive and arise in any circumstance, including in democracy.

Fifth

Fascism lives and coexists with democracy and the discourse of human rights. It is not true that democracy is antagonistic to fascism. Its expressions can arise from within liberal democracies which, while promoting the mercantile relations characteristic of capitalism, need practices that maintain the *status quo* and the dominant order.

One of the arguments for denying the existence of fascism, especially in Latin America, is that there have been no fascist regimes. This position forgets that fascism is not just a regime. It is also an ideology, a worldview and even a culture.⁸ Highlighting this element, it is claimed that it is a culture insofar as it “wanted to transform the collective imagination. To modify

lifestyles”.⁸⁽¹¹⁾ In this sense, the intertwining of fascism as culture, ideology and political project means that it can gestate and coexist in liberal democracies.

Likewise, fascism today can use the discourse of human rights to elevate militaristic, policing or disciplining practices.

It does not hide its passion for authoritarian powers, it calls for security laws, greater intervention of police intelligence, permissiveness of torture, death penalty, one-dimensional powers, etc., but unlike its predecessors it does not directly criticize democracy or human rights. It can demagogically mix phrases such as “democratic security”, “preventive war”, “necessary dictatorships”, “healthy armamentism”, etc.; at times it behaves like one of the species of “racist enlightenment”.^{1(33, highlights in the original)}

In his time, Adorno⁴ warned that “the survival of National Socialism in a democracy is potentially much more threatening than the survival of fascist tendencies against democracy”.⁴⁽¹²⁾ A current warning, as these are a kind of chameleon-like fascist expression that even uses apparent democratic or humanitarian discourse to hide its practices.

In short, today’s fascism, which coexists in liberal democracies, can express itself in different ways. Returning to Eco:

We must be careful that the meaning of these words is not forgotten again. Ur-Fascism is still all around us, sometimes in civilian clothes. It would be very convenient for us if someone were to appear on the world stage and say: “I want to reopen Auschwitz, I want the blackshirts to parade solemnly through the squares of Italy again!”. Unfortunately, life is not that easy. Ur-Fascism can still return under the most innocent of guises. Our duty is to unmask it and point the finger at each of its new forms, every day, in every part of the world.⁷⁽¹⁴⁾

Sixth

A classic characteristic of fascism is anti-communism. One of the expressions was its use as a means of stopping a political project. However, from a synchronic and situated analytical lens for the case of Latin America, this characteristic is not exhausted in this idea. Today we do not see the urgency of stopping communism in the same sense as in the mid-twentieth century. However, the political-military and ideological processes on the continent generated a broadened idea of communism that served as a tool for classifying between what maintains order and what threatens order. It was (is) the prism through which to create and pursue enemies. To classify society.

Seventh

In fascism, subjects are assumed to be objects. The essence of the subjects is irrelevant as long as what matters is to generate a “mass” of uniform population.

Totalitarianism does not consider the masses as autonomous human beings who rationally decide their own destiny and who must therefore be addressed as rational subjects, but as objects of administrative measures who must be taught, above all, to be humble and to obey orders.⁹⁽¹¹⁾

In this massification, subjects are classified. It creates an otherness that requires submission or extinction. In other words, fascism does not exist without the creation of an **other**, of a **different**. For the present day, Adorno’s warning about the creation of “specters” generated by this otherness is still valid: “Fascist propaganda attacks specters rather than real subjects, that is, it constructs an image of the Jew or the Communist and then destroys it without concerning itself too much with the correspondence between this image and reality.”⁹⁽¹¹⁾

One of the pillars from which identity emerges and, therefore, the creation of **specters** of what does not fit within this identity, is the idea of **nationhood**. From this, the conception that this **identity** is totalizing and unique is created. Adorno points out that the idea of nation has “enough force to unite hundreds of millions around objectives that they cannot consider as their own in an immediate sense”.⁴⁽²⁴⁾ It is a false discourse of a single identity, a single objective. What did not fit into the idea of the German nation was worthy of a delusional and schizophrenic persecution:

[...] nationalism could become something entirely sadistic and destructive. Hitler’s world was already like this, with its fury against everything that was different, nationalism as a paranoid system of madness; the force of attraction of precisely these features is undoubtedly no less today. Paranoia, the persecution complex that harasses others, on whom he projects everything he himself desires, is contagious.⁴⁽²⁵⁾

Even the massification within the notion of nation implies bodily and aesthetic prefigurations. “Fascist culture exalted action, virality, youth and combat, translating them into a certain image of the body, into certain gestures, emblems and symbols that were supposed to redefine national identity”.^{8.(111)} All this created a kind of bourgeois **naturalness** that implies its antithesis: the unnatural, that which does not fit in with the **values** of the nation.

With the changes in dynamics and eras, in Latin American countries today the figure of the Nation continues to be the axis from which a homogenizing identity emerges. From this idea, new classifications continue to be erected where there is a model of subject, of mass, of good people:

There is a “good people”, an “us” (manly, homophobic, anti-feminist, anti-abortion, indifferent to environmental pollution and hostile to intellectualism) and a “bad people” (immigrant, drug addict, marginal, immoral, etc.), and there is an “internal enemy” (migrants who take jobs away from nationals).^{1(33, highlights of the original)}

COLOMBIA: MILITARIZATION, ANTICOMMUNISM AND THE INTERNAL ENEMY

Taking the above premises into account, we analyze the context of Colombia. Without ignoring any of the approaches, since, as mentioned, they are a set of interrelated ideas, we will focus on the fourth and sixth theses in an attempt to argue why these two characteristics of fascism have existed and exist in the context of Colombia.

These two elements are militarization and the creation of an otherness that is persecuted and eliminated. In this case, the emphasis is on political otherness, specifically on the configuration of what is known as the internal enemy, which has anti-insurgent and anti-communist bases.

Militarization in the context of the internal conflict

Colombia is a country that has been experiencing internal confrontation for more than five decades. The conflict is based on the characteristics of the Colombian State’s constitution since the beginning of the 20th century. These characteristics go hand in hand with the development of the phases of capitalism. The prevailing form of capitalist accumulation in Colombia has been violence and dispossession.¹⁰⁽⁵⁾ That is why, for Alfredo Molano, the beginning of the recent armed conflict (which began in the mid-20th century) “begins with violence. And violence is associated with two original factors that influence each other: control over land and over the State.”¹¹⁽⁵⁾

From this understanding, the conflict suffered by Colombia is not only armed. It also involves social and political confrontations. Even the armed stage of the subversion processes responds to the dynamics of the class struggle. As Estrada rightly states: “Counterinsurgency and subversion are inherent to the capitalist social order prevailing in our country. If subversion also took the form of armed rebellion, this is essentially explained by the specific historical conditions”.¹⁰⁽⁶⁾

We have, then, that, just as fascism is part of the process of capitalism itself, the survival, dynamics and permanence of Colombia’s internal conflict also takes place within this framework.

In this context, under the pretext of stopping the armed insurgency, the Colombian State has adopted a militaristic policy that is visible in two central elements. Firstly, in the consolidation

of a State with a large military arsenal. It is a cult of the military, of its tools and techniques. This element, although it cannot be said to be fascism in itself, is coherent with and inherent to fascist regimes and ideologies. A highly militarized State is more prone to the rise of a totalitarian regime.

Secondly, the political confrontation was militarized. In the context of the conflict, with the aforementioned assumptions, the political adversary for the State and the ruling classes was confronted by military means. But, furthermore, the idea of adversary was indiscriminate: it did not matter if in reality it was the opponent in the confrontation. These elements are typical of fascist practices. However, in the case of Colombia they are camouflaged by the discourse on the laws of war: to destroy the enemy.

One of the tools that influenced the direction taken was the application and adaptation of the National Security Doctrine. Although it was used in Latin America as the variant of national security that emerged in Europe after the Second World War, Colombia's own context fed it back with elements that even make it survive to the present day. Let's see.

In general terms, the National Security Doctrine implies "a military conception of the State and the functioning of society, which explains the importance of the 'occupation' of state institutions by the military".^{12(75, emphasis in original)} In its genesis and development, the essence of the doctrine was to pursue two elements: the internal enemy and the fight against communism. Although from the 1960's onwards, in official speeches the armed insurgency was positioned as the enemy, the truth is that the construction of the enemy was to mark a characteristic of the Colombian State: to position as an enemy any adversary, armed or not, of the established order and the supposed supreme interests of the country.

Since the internalization of the National Security Doctrine, it has helped to consolidate a kind of reactive state in the face of difference, self-management processes, social demands and, in general, everything that goes beyond the identity of the nation State. This is not only materialized in military actions, it is accompanied by the generation of a collective imaginary that seeks to implement a social and cultural idea of what is **good** for the country. It is a kind of subjectivity that is based on the false idea of **good order** and/or security. This generates justifications and encourages cultural violence.

In 2011, a process of changing the doctrine of the military forces was institutionally established to implement the Damascus Doctrine, with the idea — according to the government of Juan Manuel Santos (2010–2018) — of leaving the National Security Doctrine behind. The

government of Iván Duque (2018–2022) preferred to put this transition on hold. It returned to the principles of the National Security Doctrine.

Regardless of the attempts of change according to the governments in power, the practices of the National Security Doctrine were constructed as a State policy. The process of internalizing the doctrine has historical roots that cannot be eliminated with decrees. Furthermore, the ideas of this doctrine went beyond the military forces; it was internalized by the ruling elites; later, it became part of their forms of struggle. Although the precepts of the National Security Doctrine guide the armed forces, they are not limited to this field. As highlighted, this idea forged a subjectivity in a sector of society that reproduces the idea of the enemy, of fear in the face of the supposed danger it generates, the stigma and even justifies its elimination.

This leads to the conclusion that the National Security Doctrine is not just a military tool: it is the vision of a social order that must fight against any expression that threatens it. This explains why it is still valid within the military forces and certain sectors of Colombian society.

Having said that, let's look at the anti-communist struggle in Colombia in greater detail. As stated in the sixth thesis, anti-communism is characteristic of fascism. However, is it still valid to maintain this idea today? In the case at hand, the context of Colombia, the answer is yes.

The spread of anti-communism as a characteristic of fascist practices in Colombia

It has been said that one of the historical practices in Colombia is the creation of enemies, of otherness, of an adversary to be fought militarily. A wanton persecution of this other that can even be specters, as Adorno puts it. One of the tools for the creation of this enemy was the fight against communism or anti-communism.

Is yesterday's anticommunism the same as today's? Is it a kind of old wine in a new bottle? Given the historical dynamics, it would be a mistake to say that it is the same anticommunism. It has varied with the historical dynamics. Beyond the characteristics of each era, what is important to highlight is that the idea of anticommunism, with its changes, is still present in Colombia.

While it is true that anticommunism is seen as a way of stopping the political project or, in other words, stopping the revolution, it is also true that it was the discursive and practical platform for generating a political otherness that had to be eliminated. The latter regardless of whether or not it is communism; whether or not there is a revolutionary project. Let us remember that for fascist propaganda, as Adorno rightly warns,⁽⁹⁾ it does not matter if the discourse coincides with

reality. In this way, a particular anti-communism emerged in Colombia, even before the Cold War - as we shall see later - which has persisted to the present day.

Initially, from 1920 and the first decades of the Cold War, anti-communism concentrated on stopping a political project. The classic idea of stopping the communist revolution. In the 1920's, different mechanisms were used to stop the spread of the Russian Revolution.

One of the mechanisms was the passing of laws which, from the perspective of conservative hegemony, would stop any communist expression. On April 26, 1927, a decree was signed authorizing the police to arrest any expression of political organization, in the run-up to the May Day commemoration.¹³ In November of the same year, Law 103 was passed, tightening immigration regulations, especially for people who promulgated communist or anarchist doctrines. The most emblematic law of this period was what became known as the Heroic Law, which sought to stop **the Bolshevik threat**. After tense debates in the legislature, and opposition from a sector of the Liberal Party, the law was passed in September 1928. Among other mechanisms, it made it a crime to organize society, to attempt subversion, and to take actions that threaten public order, the family and private property. One striking aspect of the law was the creation of press judges. These were judges whose duties included reviewing the content of the press and censoring its content.¹⁴

With the advent of the Cold War, this line of action was continued: the creation of all kinds of tools, including legal ones, to stop the **communist project**. From 1950 the concern was to stop international communism. The moment coincided with a political context conducive to the germination of this type of anti-communism: the violence unleashed after the assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitán in 1948; the rise to the presidency of the conservative leader, Laureano Gómez, a sympathizer of Francoism, in 1950; the coming to power of General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla.

During the period of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, legislative act no. 6 of September 14, 1954, “by which the prohibition of international communism is decreed,”¹³⁽¹⁸⁾ whose first article established: “the political activity of international communism is prohibited.”¹³⁽¹⁸⁾ In 1956, decree no. 434 was issued, which was responsible for regulating the legislative act. “According to Rojas’ measure, it was necessary to regulate the prohibition of international communism, since ‘such activity threatens the Christian and democratic tradition and institutions of the Republic, and disturbs public peace and tranquillity’”.¹³⁽¹⁹⁾

These provisions marked a new direction in the class struggle in Colombia. Firstly, the Communist Party was forced into hiding, but, in addition, regulation and censorship extended to all communist expression, or rather, to that which the authorities assumed to be communist¹⁴. Secondly, in rural areas, the persecution and bombing of peasants who demanded land and sought self-managed forms of social organization began.

This climate led to a kind of communist delirium: the persecution of any person or expression that was outside the *status quo*, the State and its interests, which are those of the elites. That is why we talk about the broadening of anti-communism: it is not only the arrest of revolutionary processes, it is the tool to generate otherness and eliminate it. It is a kind of crude anti-communism: it does not spare, nor is it interested in, ideological or real support. It is applied to everything that wants to be determined as an **enemy** of the State.

Anti-communism is combined with anti-insurgent struggles. When the existence of these practices is alluded to, two mistakes are often made: 1) considering that it began with the emergence of the guerrillas in Colombia in the 1960's; and 2) believing that its targets are only armed insurgencies.

Regarding the first, Renán Vega alludes to the existence of a historical counterinsurgency, which has been developing since the beginning of the 20th century. He refers to it as **native counterinsurgency**.¹⁵ This is a persecution that has been consolidated since the 1920's to persecute anyone considered to be left-wing or even to have liberal ideas. Since then, it has been acting under the logic of creating and persecuting an enemy.

In counterinsurgency, the construction of the enemy is fundamental, which has been done since the 1920's when the idea of communism as the supreme adversary of the "sacred values" of Colombian nationality was conceived. Under the generic name of communism, a diverse range of social sectors are represented, including trade unions, peasant associations and, in general, those who demand improvements in their living conditions, and as such must be fought. In Colombia, anti-communism predated the emergence of any movement that could be called communist and, in the same way, counterinsurgency arose before there were any guerrilla movements.¹⁵⁽¹¹⁾

It is about the genesis of stereotypes that are considered dangerous to national interests. Let us remember that, at the time, Colombia was under the rule of the conservative hegemony established since 1903. This native counterinsurgency gestates a characteristic that will be strengthened until the present: fear.

The long-term constitution of a counterinsurgent state originates in several complementary fears of the ruling classes: *fear of the people, fear of democracy and fear of revolution*. These fears are fed by stereotypes of communists as evil, barbaric, savage and enemies of God, the Fatherland and the Law, which are the ferment of the *hatred of counter-insurgents* that justifies in advance the violence that is exercised against these “enemies”, both by the State and by individuals. This counter-insurgent hatred was brewing in the 1920s and was fuelled by the terror caused by the social protests that had been unleashed in the country since 1918.¹⁵⁽¹¹⁾

According to Vega Cantor's study,¹⁵ the second phase of the counterinsurgency policy corresponds to the period when the Liberal Party was in power from 1930. In this period “anticommunism was preached from the pulpits by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the bulk of the conservative party - as a way of manifesting their opposition to the Liberal Republic”.¹³⁽¹⁷⁾ It was a time when liberal positions, not exactly left-wing, were assumed to be enemies and were labeled dangerous.

Renan Vega explains that the Spanish Civil War was used as a pretext by the conservatives to demonize communism and the reformist sector of the liberal party. In their speeches, they presented a struggle between Catholicism and atheistic communism.¹⁵

We are therefore witnessing the consolidation of a state, led and consolidated by the country's elites, with deep anti-insurgent roots. But, as has been highlighted, this vision is also internalized and disseminated in different social sectors. One of the examples found in historical studies of the period is the emergence of the Leopards group.

This was a group of intellectuals who had belonged to the Conservative Party. Among the most prominent were Álzate Avendaño and Silvio Villegas. They “added the fascist ingredient to that pre-insurrectionary climate of the right, and this attitude was influenced to no small extent by the triumph of the Popular Front in Spain in February 1936”.¹⁴⁽²⁹⁰⁾

In general, their ideology was identified with the rise of European National Socialism. They agreed on raising the banners of defending the homeland based on national values, order, authority and the defense of the Catholic religion.

The Leopards would begin to enjoy wide recognition within the Conservative Party and in the political context in general. Around the group of young conservatives, a united front began to take shape, made up of the Catholic press from different regions of the country and some of the most prominent conservative political figures of the time, in charge of an intellectual and political reconstruction of conservatism.¹⁶⁽¹³⁵⁾

The existence of Los Leopardos is often underestimated; it is seen as nothing more than a kind of study group for the dissemination of propaganda. While this is true, it cannot be forgotten that the dissemination of fascist principles or their propaganda is not a minor element in the dispute over subjectivities. Although it was a group of its time, it exemplifies the emergence of different social expressions that have forged, over time, nationalist visions and a cult of the supposed good order of society.

David Rincón¹⁶, in his research on fascism in Colombia during the period 1936-1941, presents an almost unpublished work on the subject. It is a book by Antonio Cusgüén¹⁷ written in 1934, in which he calls on the trade unions of the time to be alert to the advent of fascism. According to Cusgüén's analysis¹⁵, the country presented conditions conducive to this, especially with the marked nationalism and the rise of conservative ideology.

As the author presented, the conditions in the country in the mid-1930's generated a favorable environment for the emergence of fascism, motivated by political tension, fragmentation within traditional parties and the rise of far-right thinking that had been spreading among new conservative groups since the previous decade.¹⁶⁽¹²⁸⁾

The warning was not an exaggeration. It is a reading of the time, but also a forecast of what could happen. He was not wrong. Although it did not culminate in the rise of a European-style regime, it did lead to the incubation of a state that would appropriate those visions and practices and a subjectivity in some social sectors. "[T]he flow of ideas from Francoism and fascism and, in particular, the notion of 'racial purity' shared by sectors of the conservative and liberal elites, in the collective imagination of a traditional, rural society divided into castes. For them, Latin Americans were an inferior race because of the indigenous and black component of their populations."¹⁷⁽⁴⁹⁾

From 1940 anticommunism "ceases to be an exclusive conception of the Conservative Party and the Catholic hierarchy to become the State doctrine that justifies the persecution of popular insurgency, the establishment of State Terrorism and the alliance with the United States in the context of the Cold War".¹⁵⁽¹⁸⁾

By the 1950's, the combination of "native counterinsurgency" with Cold War anti-communism led to a kind of Colombian anti-communism with its own features and characteristics. As mentioned above, it was not only the arrest of the revolution, but also the persecution of what was considered dangerous to the national order. Likewise, it mixes militarization with actions that

generate subjectivities, it takes up those that have been historically brewing for decades and feeds and energizes them with the passage of time.

This combination unleashes and reflects what will from then on be a fear and, therefore, a hatred of the popular, of the people, of direct democracy, of community and communal processes. It is the framework that gestates otherness, the enemy. We have, then, the configuration of one of the characteristics of fascism, as set out in the sixth and seventh thesis.

The construction of this enemy, of yesterday and today, is done under a dichotomous prism that classifies people and behaviors. Just as the discourse in the 1930's focused on the Catholic/atheist divide, in the following decades it was about friend/enemy; civilized/insurgent; good citizen/non-citizen; good people/vandals.

This latter duality was perceived in the last social uprising that Colombia experienced in 2021. This was the scenario where, among other things, the hatred and the different historical strategies that have been developed in the country to counteract this type of revolt were reflected. It is the most recent example where fascist practices were evident: the militarization of social protest, the murders, the expressions of hatred and the configuration of the enemy.

Regarding the latter, it is worth mentioning, by way of example, that one of the enemies created in the 2021 strike were human rights defenders. They were assumed to be part of the neo-configuration of the idea of the internal enemy. Therefore, they were the target of political violence by the State and its various strategies.¹⁹ Let us remember that one of the adversaries of fascism is pacifism; it is therefore not surprising that leaders who defend human rights and peacebuilding are targeted.

CONCLUSIONS

FASCIST PRACTICES FIND FERTILE GROUND

The initial question of this text was about the validity or otherwise of talking about fascism in Colombia. From the reflection made in these pages, the answer is that it is valid to talk about fascism. The existence of a scenario with a cult of militarism, the militarization of the adversary and the historical tendency to construct an enemy has generated favorable spaces for fascist practices to materialize with greater force at certain moments.

They are not circumstantial practices, they are historical; they are not sporadic, they have been constant; they are not isolated, they are related to the economic interests of the Nation-State

which have not been different to the development of capitalism. They are practices internalized as state policy. This does not mean that in some governments these practices have been accentuated or materialized more strongly. Rather, it is a question of understanding them as a historical process.

The context of armed conflict not only camouflaged some fascist practices, such as those described of the internal enemy or militarization of the political adversary, it also naturalized those practices under the pretext of internal war. That is to say, fascist practices are hidden in the name of warlike actions. An example of this is the persecution, imprisonment and assassination of union leaders in the 1970's under the security statute of President Julio Cesar Turbay. In more recent years, specifically during the presidential terms of Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002–2010), there is the murder of civilians to make them appear as supposed guerrillas killed in combat.⁶³

The National Security Doctrine was the scenario that fed these fascist practices. It promoted the creation of a subjectivity that remains to this day. Colombia's own connotations make it valid to continue analyzing anticommunism as a characteristic in the configuration of these practices. It is a question of unveiling it as a State policy, with its military practices, but also as the construction of social imaginaries that have fed, justified and generated political and cultural violence within Colombian society.

These practices were conceived and coexist within the rule of law, democracy and the framework of human rights discourse. That is why they can present themselves or be camouflaged in different ways. Today's fascism, specifically in Colombia, will not take the form of concentration camps or the images of Auschwitz. It has had and has other images that need to be seen and made visible.

For reasons of space, the component of paramilitarism was not mentioned. However, it is a factor present in military practices and in the execution of the internal enemy. Likewise, paramilitary action has been a tool to promote and establish through violence a social order desired by ultra-conservative ideologies. In future research and reflection, it is necessary to delve deeper into the role of paramilitarism in the execution and expansion of fascist practices in Colombia.

Finally, for all the above reasons, it is necessary to emphasize that anti-fascist struggles are pertinent. Just as in the 1930's there were warnings about the rise of fascism, in the 21st century

⁶³ To date, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace has documented 6,402 cases of such killings. Most of them are young peasant men or young men from poor neighborhoods in some Colombian cities. Many cases stand out where the victims had some type of disability. In Colombia they were known as "false positives". In reality, they are an example of practices of extermination of the civilian population under the discourse of war.

the call continues to be heard. Especially when they are clouded by the dominance of liberal democratic discourses.

It is necessary to take on fascist expressions and subjectivities without forgetting their historical process and their evolution into the characteristics of the present. The latter implies warning about and unveiling the discourses that extol supposed freedoms and are camouflages of ultra-conservative visions.

We must not forget that the fight against fascism is a fight against capitalism. Just as capitalism is not homogeneous and has cracks that lead to its demolition, fascism - in regime, subjectivities and practices - also has them. Affirming its existence does not imply alluding to a sentence of its eternal presence, as if history were closed. It is, rather, a call to deepen and not underestimate anti-fascist struggles. For the reflection raised in these pages, it will be said, then, that in Colombia these types of struggles go hand in hand against militarization and the deconstruction of the idea of an internal enemy.

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