

The latent, the diffuse. The destruction of truth that opens the door to fascism

Lo latente, difuso. La destrucción de la verdad que abre la puerta al fascismo

O latente, difuso. A destruição da verdade que abre a porta ao fascismo

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Abstract

This article addresses relevant aspects that point to the persistence of fascism in social structures in Spain, similar to what occurs internationally, from a critical perspective that embraces the complexity of the problem and the need to address it from all possible angles. The underlying idea is that, in the current democratic system, hidden tendencies persist, which occasionally emerge and contain analogies, in theory and practice, with the principles that gave rise to fascism in the 20th century. The hypothesis put forward in the article is that these tendencies have in common the distortion of truth for maintaining ideas close to fascism. The manipulation of information, the resurgence of nationalist feelings, dehumanization, and the use of fear as a weapon are some of the threats that permanently loom over our society, determining that what is at stake is not the survival of the people as an abstract, and as a group, but the dominance of the individuals who comprise it. To combat these threats, the author proposes activating community strategies that promote greater social awareness and, at the same time, re-establish the search for truth.

Keywords: Authority, dominant culture, disinformation, discourse, communication strategies, fascism, philosophy, critical thinking, power, politics, sociology, totalitarianism.

Resumen

Este artículo aborda aspectos relevantes que apuntan a la persistencia del fascismo en las estructuras sociales en España, de forma similar a lo que ocurre a nivel internacional, desde una perspectiva crítica que asume la complejidad del problema y la necesidad de abordarlo desde todos los ángulos posibles. La idea subyacente es que, en el actual sistema democrático, persisten tendencias ocultas, que ocasionalmente emergen y que contienen analogías, en la teoría y en la práctica, con los principios que dieron origen al fascismo en el siglo XX. La hipótesis que se plantea en el artículo es que estas tendencias tienen en común la distorsión de la verdad en favor de mantener ideas cercanas al fascismo. Así, la manipulación de la información, el resurgimiento de los sentimientos nacionalistas, la

deshumanización y el uso del miedo como arma son algunas de las amenazas que se ciernen permanentemente sobre nuestra sociedad, determinando que lo que está en juego no sea la supervivencia del pueblo como configuración abstracta y grupal, sino el dominio de los individuos que lo integran o que aspiran a formar parte de él. Para combatir estas amenazas, el autor propone la activación de estrategias comunitarias que promuevan una mayor conciencia social y, al mismo tiempo, restablezcan la búsqueda de la verdad.

Palabras clave: Autoridad, cultura dominante, desinformación, discurso, estrategias de comunicación, fascismo, filosofía, pensamiento crítico, poder, política, sociología, totalitarismo.

Resumo

Este artigo aborda aspectos relevantes que apontam para a persistência do fascismo nas estruturas sociais em Espanha, à semelhança do que acontece a nível internacional, a partir de uma perspetiva crítica que assume a complexidade do problema e a necessidade de o abordar de todos os ângulos possíveis. A ideia subjacente é que, no atual sistema democrático, persistem tendências ocultas, que emergem ocasionalmente e que contêm analogias, na teoria e na prática, com os princípios que deram origem ao fascismo no século XX. A hipótese avançada no artigo é que essas tendências têm em comum a distorção da verdade em favor da manutenção de ideias próximas do fascismo. Assim, a manipulação da informação, o ressurgimento de sentimentos nacionalistas, a desumanização e a utilização do medo como arma são algumas das ameaças que pairam permanentemente sobre a nossa sociedade, determinando que o que está em causa não é a sobrevivência do povo enquanto configuração abstrata e grupal, mas o domínio dos indivíduos que o compõem ou que aspiram a fazer parte dele. Para combater estas ameaças, o autor propõe a ativação de estratégias comunitárias que promovam uma maior consciência social e, ao mesmo tempo, restabeleçam a busca da verdade.

Palavras-chave: Autoridade, cultura dominante, desinformação, discurso, estratégias de comunicação, fascismo, filosofia, pensamento crítico, poder, política, sociologia, totalitarismo.

Introduction. Is fascism resurfacing as an idea?

What is fascism in Spain today? This question can be found even on Telegram, a social network filled with broadcast channels of fixed worldviews, like butterflies pinned inside a hermetically sealed box — always on the verge of taking flight. It was posed by one user in response to another about the "Patriots Summit," held in Madrid on February 7 and 8, 2025, a gathering of "fascists." The summit brought together several leaders of the European far right (Santos, 2025). The question aimed to highlight the difficulty of clearly defining the scope of fascism in Spanish society and, above all, whether this new fascism, increasingly perceived as a real danger, is rooted in what we might call historical fascism.

There were no clear answers to this question, which itself reveals the complexity -at least at first glance- of determining the extent to which fascism has infiltrated society, especially when comparing it to its past manifestations. In other words: identifying traits that might indicate the survival of fascist ideology in the present, even partially, through specific events. We are speaking, in any case, of post-fascism — that is, those manifestations and actions that, taking place in the current context, represent a continuation of twentieth-century fascist ideology.

It is also clear -especially judging by the rise of far-right and openly fascist parties- that the phenomenon we are trying to describe is highly relevant today, potentially signaling a sociological trend.

First, we must note that although they remain minorities, there are groups that openly identify as fascists. The only real debate in those cases is which aspects of the (fascist) past they aim to revive. “God, Homeland, and Family,” for example, is the slogan of Brothers of Italy, the party of Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni —directly borrowed from the fascist rhetoric of the 1930s (Gayozzo, 2022).

“Fascist slogans are back, Nazi salutes, the beastly masses giving likes. The thumbs-up that made tech magnates rich.” This was how the editorial of *Carne Cruda* (Raw Meat) began on Instagram on January 23, 2025, introducing the podcast *The Era of Emperors*, where program director Javier Gallego highlighted the resurgence and normalization of fascist imagery.

Adorno (2005), in his *Essays on Fascist Propaganda*, particularly in the chapter What Does It Mean to Work Through the Past? brings this issue into focus:

That fascism survives, that the much-repeated notion of working through the past has not yet been achieved and has instead degenerated into its own caricature -a cold, hollow forgetting- is due to the fact that the objective social conditions that gave rise to fascism still persist. (p. 64).

For Adorno, the collective identifications that enabled the rise of fascism continued to persist in latent form, along with the collective narcissism that encompassed its deeper causes: “Only because the causes still exist, their spell has not been broken to this day,” Adorno concludes (2005, p. 70).

In other words, the issue is not merely that ideologies akin to fascism have somehow returned, but that, to varying degrees, society itself may allow the ideological principles of fascism to be applied —either openly or covertly.

In 2015, Marcia Tiburi warned of an inescapable reality in the prologue to her book *How to Talk to a Fascist: Reflections on the Authoritarianism of Everyday Life*: “Unfortunately, fascism is among us. In various countries and cities around the world, it is re-emerging as a phenomenon, either through personal manifestations of diverse prejudices or as a direct expression of authoritarianism” (2015, p. 19).

To acknowledge the range of definitions and perspectives that have been -and continue to be- applied to the word fascism is relevant. Umberto Eco (2019, 2019a) used the terms Ur-Fascism, and eternal fascism, to define what he saw as the essential features of fascism. These include, among others: traditionalism, irrationalism, anti-intellectualism and the rejection of critical thinking, fear of difference, nationalism, anti-pacifism, elitism, the cult of the hero, machismo, emotional populism, and a fascination with newspeak —which, for Eco, finds its modern equivalent in the reality show.

Many philosophers and historians have dedicated their work to studying fascism from an epistemological standpoint. These include Hannah Arendt (*The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1998; Leanza, 2023), Emilio Gentile (*Fascismo, storia e interpretazione*, 2005; Priorelli, 2024), Robert Paxton (*The Anatomy of Fascism*; Mason, 2020), and Steven Forti (*Democracies in Extinction*, 2024).

Forti (2024) specifically warns against interpreting the new far-right movements exclusively through the lens of fascism, due to what he calls the semantic inflation of the term —a point echoed by other historians such as Roger Griffin (2010). Nevertheless, despite this semantic inflation, it seems equally implausible to deny that fascism still inhabits the core of societies and lies in wait for the opportunity to resurface and pursue its political aims.

Authoritarianism and the Distortion of Truth

Paradoxically, if authority -as a rhetorical figure- serves only to personify another term, that of truth, the word fascism itself stems from the idealization of the Roman magistrature, which transformed the Latin *auctoritas* (from the verb *augere*, meaning to increase, to make grow) into an attribute of magnitude, and consequently, the exaltation of a single possible truth —one transmitted vertically and exercised through power.

The underlying notion persists: whatever the cost, the structures of authority governing individual behavior must be preserved. In Spain, there are abundant examples of this in the criminalization of protest in all its forms -some of them been denounced by Amnesty International (2014)-, providing serious evidence that authority “defends” itself using all available means, including the distortion of truth. We cannot overlook the case of the Zaragoza Six, imprisoned for attending an anti-fascist demonstration (Alonso, 2024; González and Plana, 2025); the Gijón Six, union members convicted by the Supreme Court for organizing picket lines outside a bakery (6 de la Suiza, 2025; Forner, 2024); or the sentencing of six people to prison and fines for rehabilitating an abandoned village in Guadalajara (Romero, 2023; Brunat, 2018).

These structures of authority, their preservation -and the demonstration of their invulnerability-, imply a form of sacrifice that societies are expected to assume without question. Referring to the fiction of sacrifice, Slavoj Žižek points to the dissolution of duty into the irrational: “Fascist ideology is based on a

purely formal imperative: obey because you must” (1998, p. 115). This, in turn, allows for the justification of excess.

The arbitrary executions carried out through the judicial system are not so much intended to administer fair, individual punishment, but rather to impose a higher-order corrective of a social nature—an act of public chastisement. That is, obedience leads to the preservation, at all costs, of a civil order that is perceived to be under threat by social movements and their disobedience.

This defense of the status quo through the force of law encompasses political and religious domains, but also cultural ones, often deeply rooted in patriarchal traditions. The advance of fascism requires the implantation of simplistic beliefs and thought patterns that stand in opposition to Enlightenment rationality. Likewise, it requires complacency and silence.

Jordi Gracia, in his book *La resistencia silenciosa: fascismo y cultura en España* (2004), describes how intellectual activity during the early decades of Francoism found an ally in the regime, thereby indirectly sustaining Francoist cultural reductionism. In contemporary times, and without the repression that characterized that era, silence -or the passive acceptance of evidently unjust decisions- is also a symptom of society’s fragility in the face of authoritarian measures. Conversely, public opposition to such decisions may serve as an antidote to authoritarian impulses.

The Juana Rivas case illustrates this well. In 2018, Judge Manuel Piñar sentenced Rivas to five years in prison, six years of loss of parental rights, and a €30,000 fine for two counts of child abduction in 2016. His principal argument was that she had “exploited the abuse narrative.” Many voices -from within political spheres- decried this reasoning as disproportionate or even misogynistic. At the media and popular level, when the Criminal Court No. 1 of Granada ordered the execution of the two-and-a-half-year prison sentence in May 2021, there was a widespread reaction of outrage, particularly given that the judge’s record indicated obsessive behavior (Gómez, 2025; Sarrión, 2025).

Although the legal proceedings continued unchanged, without this media and popular reaction (and the pressure from certain political groups), the partial pardon granted on November 16, 2021, by the Council of Ministers, would not have occurred. The Juana Rivas case is not an isolated incident, and many similar actions -whether from direct or indirect power structures- indicate that we are merely witnessing the visible tip of the iceberg.

This suspicion is largely fueled by the continued enforcement of the so-called gag law, a colloquial term referring to Organic Law 4/2015, of March 30, on the protection of citizen security in Spain. According to Amnesty International (2014) and Human Rights Watch (2025), this law poses a direct threat to the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. One of the most widely criticized aspects is the disproportionate power granted to law enforcement, which directly undermines the right to protest and,

more broadly, the defense of truth —since truth itself cannot stand against the official narrative upheld by law enforcement.

The fact that this law has yet to be repealed -and that political parties such as the Partido Popular and Vox continue to support its implementation- demonstrates how a significant sector of society ultimately accepts an imposed imaginary whose ideological foundations align with certain classical tenets of fascism.

Language and Emotional Manipulation

While it may be asserted that, as European societies evolve, outdated concepts linked to authority as a vehicle of power are gradually left behind, the remnants of that insidious equivalence between authority and power still persist. Likewise, the manipulation of media headlines continues unabated, to the extent that information is often redefined as disinformation. In this sense, it is particularly revealing to compare the headlines published by Falange newspapers during the survival of Nazism in Germany (Lazo, 1995, p. 303) with those of certain contemporary outlets covering the war in Ukraine or the so-called war between Israel and Palestine.

All the principles that Joseph Goebbels developed throughout his career within the Nazi Party and as Hitler's Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, may be the norm in many places today (Aramayo, 2021; Juste, 2021). These principles have been systematized by Marçal Moliné (2013), who identified eleven strategies for disseminating propaganda: simplification and a single enemy, contagion, transposition, exaggeration and distortion, vulgarization, orchestration, repetition, plausibility, silencing, transfusion, and unanimity.

These values continue to be employed by far-right parties. An example of this is the exaggeration and distortion: this remains a prevalent political strategy. The tactic of transforming minor anecdotes into severe threats is a daily feature of conservative populism, often aided by complicit media: the criminalization of unaccompanied foreign minors (UNICEF, 2019), occupied public debates and news coverage that effectively handed the far right the discursive tools necessary to justify their political agendas.

Deformation of truth through information may also entail the destruction of language itself. In his book *LTl: The Language of the Third Reich*, Victor Klemperer shows how language was deliberately dismantled. Isolated words, expressions, and syntactic structures were converted into emotional triggers, repeated millions of times until adopted unconsciously and mechanically by the population (2001, p. 31).

The destruction of language has a logical consequence: the annihilation of truth, replaced by an authority that dictates its own version of it. Fake news not only spreads falsehoods; it also facilitates the proliferation of totalitarian ideologies (Carbone, 2024).

One of these ideologies is the exaltation of nationalism and the uncritical defense of "our own." In a world economically globalized, our sense of belonging remains tied to territorial notions. Territorialized language enables the articulation of a superior goal of national construction, allowing individuals to accept their role in this machinery as natural. Here lies the crux of manipulation: abstract ideas and mass cohesion are prioritized over essential, life-oriented needs.

Giovanni Gentile (2022), in *The Doctrine of Fascism. Benito Mussolini*, traces its origin to the idea of the corporative state, which gave rise to a terrifying militarized regime modeled after earlier military dictatorships. Today, post-fascism spreads beneath the surface of society in concealed ways, benefiting from the confusion generated by mass media that rely on the distortion of truth. Nevertheless, the method of transmission remains the same: beliefs and emotions take precedence in the manipulation of the masses.

The ultimate goal is to reshape the imaginary -as defined by Cornelius Castoriadis (Hessel, 2022)- transforming social representations embedded in institutions into a worldview in which power always acts righteously. In this regard, disinformation or manipulated information should not be seen as innocent strategies to shield vulnerable individuals from harsh realities. Rather, they are tools for producing societal tolerance toward post-fascism.

There is no need to overtly impose the harshest theses of fascism; they can be enacted within a democratic system, not only through far-right political parties but also through the passive acceptance and complicity of large segments of society. As Francisco Sierra notes, we are witnessing a "militarized imperial discourse of barbarism disguised as progress" (2019, p. 171).

The perverse manipulation of the social imaginary can be perceived as the only path to collective salvation. In the interwar period of the twentieth century, the notion of "national salvation" (Griffin, 2010, p. 364) prevailed, with fascism seen as the force capable of protecting nations from crisis. Today, post-fascism continues to function as a social adhesive in the face of successive social and economic crises. Back then, the power of self-proclaimed saviors was accepted without question. Today, a similar logic seems applicable to the unchecked flow of neo-Nazi ideas on social media, which continue to offer, in exchange for manipulated public opinion, all kinds of redemptive promises—including increased military spending or technological advancement as the only route to development.

At its core, the salvation promised by post-fascism aligns with a new paradigm in which capitalism adopts a protectionist stance for those who, feeling privileged within the system, fear losing their status. In this sense, one could argue that it is the natural consequence of liberal capitalism: offering individuals a form of self-liberation from their own existential frustration in exchange for abstract protection.

Post-fascism does not need to declare itself as such to advocate dismantling universal public services. It proposes, instead, an ultra-liberal rulebook framed as "freedom," in which only those who can save or

inherit capital will survive —a classic "every man for himself" doctrine. These tenets belong to an increasingly productive and dehumanized system where violence may come to be viewed as an acceptable means to an end. Consider the October 2023 survey by the Israel Democracy Institute, in which 70.8% of Israelis stated that the suffering of the Palestinian population should not be considered in the development of the conflict.

To reach such a brutal lack of empathy, post-fascism may have had to embed itself over time within family, educational, and social structures. But it could also be that societies -not only Israeli one- are coming to terms with the absence of hope. As the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch once argued, the best antidote to fascism is militant optimism: a utopian, constructive function capable of steering culture toward a tangible goal (2007, p. 135).

In a context saturated with micro-information, endlessly diffused, disinformation and fabricated narratives take root not because they carry blades -though sometimes they do- but because they are the messages that audiences want to hear to feel good, to preserve their comfort, to avoid confronting the biases and prejudices that give rise to hatred, intolerance, or fanaticism, and, perhaps above all, to feel part of a group. All of this unfolds in the absence of higher, vital objectives.

Do not ask whether most citizens in Israel support the massacres ordered by their religious leaders. Ask yourself how it is happening, how it has become possible to poison entire populations with fascism, without those populations recognizing the poison in their thoughts or in their emotions.

Microfascisms, Nationalisms, and Militarisms

The term microfascism was coined by Deleuze and Guattari, to refer to the presence of fascist elements within social structures and individual thought, beyond institutional manifestations: "If fascism is dangerous, it is due to its micropolitical or molecular power, as it is a mass movement: a cancerous body rather than a totalitarian organism" (1994, p. 219).

Microfascisms, understood as a set of attitudes that push citizens to act according to principles close to fascism, play a significant role in enabling tolerance toward overtly fascist ideologies. Much like patriarchy relies not only on individual sexist behaviors but also on societal tolerance of them, latent fascism -waiting for the right moment to assert itself- requires social mechanisms that keep it alive. These mechanisms are typically irrational in nature, more rooted in beliefs than in critical thought. The manipulation of emotions is fundamental for fascism to remain lurking, biding its time to merge with power —even without the need to overthrow any democracy.

One of the most manipulated emotions is patriotism, a feeling often tied to phenomena and events that promote the unification of people in competition with others. In this context, sports can play a pivotal role.

Historian Patrizia Dogliani emphasizes not only the fascist regime's ability to mobilize through sports but also its power of legitimation: "The fascist regime turned Italy into one of the first modern nations to use sports as a tool of political propaganda and to make its athletes the most famous ambassadors abroad" (2017, p. 220). The Third Reich similarly attempted to exploit the concept of the Aryan race through the meticulous organization of the 1936 Berlin Olympics, although, as depicted in Leni Riefenstahl's film *Olympia* (2017), this idea was clearly undermined by the victories of African American and Asian athletes.

Today, sports continue to wield the same emotional power and capacity to unite people around a shared cause. It remains a common site for the construction of what we might call identity -whether tied to a nation or a specific territory-, though in a more fleeting and spectral way than in the early 20th century.

Despite the contradictions posed by the internationalization of brands and customs, sports -like other cultural practices- remain to be used to generate icons that distinguish one country or territory from others. These icons may also function negatively, serving to reinforce our non-belonging to certain places through their rejection. Even when foreign-born players occupy prominent positions in sports, the symbolic representation of the country or team remains paramount. Such representations are unlikely to alter broader social realities, such as the persistence of immigrant detention centers, to cite just one example.

Moreover, the deep-rooted use of identity symbols may be linked to a persistent tendency toward tribalism. In his book *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*, Michel Maffesoli refers to a "gut-based thinking," a kind of thought attuned to common sensations, words, and emotions (2004, p. 37). From an anthropological perspective, tribalism refers to a well-documented cultural phenomenon in which individuals form groups or social organizations through which they identify and affirm themselves. Whether to generate solidarity in collective tasks or to preserve community cohesion in the face of external threats, tribalism appears to be a phenomenon intimately tied to the development of our species. But is it still necessary in contemporary societies? And to what extent might it be complicit in the emergence of new post-fascisms?

While the creation of community may involve collective work for the common good, the desire to belong can also foster blind acceptance of group norms, stifling dissent and denying the existence of shared traits with other groups perceived as "different." In other words, it can lead to the denial of what Morín (2025) refers to as "psycho-affective universals" —those emotional and psychological traits shared by all members of the human species.

As Eva Illouz explains in her book *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*, "the construction of capitalism took place alongside the construction of a highly specialized emotional culture" (2007, p. 18). Thus, the manipulation of emotions is inherent not only to the entertainment industry but also to capitalism more broadly.

The intoxicating feeling of belonging to a territory -most vividly expressed in the collective euphoria following a sports victory- may appear to be a harmless event that simply unites individuals and reaffirms their identity as members of a city or nation. However, the emotional explosion tied to such moments is also linked to the erosion of critical thinking, the normalization of banality, and a state of social numbness.

The widely held belief that there is no viable future without a nation to protect us -or a state to suppress external threats, whether moral, ideological, cultural, or material- creates fertile ground for the resurgence of governing systems that, although born within democratic frameworks, are capable of devolving into forms that curtail fundamental rights.

Viewing national problems with the same lens used for a football match or a Eurovision contest may feed into new forms of fascism that justify simplistic solutions —ones that can lead to perilous national or even geopolitical consequences. Encouraging nationalism at a micro level can ultimately justify any kind of war or genocidal aggression. The revival of militaristic fervor across the globe is sustained only through the normalized acceptance of naive ideas such as the need to rearm to become stronger, or to fight in order to defend oneself.

Not far from this context, in Israel, a theocratic regime has been established under the guise of democracy —a regime capable of committing atrocious acts of genocide. Yet Europe, as of today, continues to send weapons or collaborates through its passivity.

Dehumanization: The Tragedy of Migration

The prevailing perception of predatory capitalism is that it encompasses every aspect of the commodification of human needs: precarious employment, exploitation of people in other territories for the importation of raw materials, the dismantling of basic services -healthcare, education, culture- and a long list of tolerated initiatives, approved by governments or even subsidized by the European Union, all of which ultimately serve to concentrate economic power in very few hands. This concentration facilitates the manipulation of the economy and vital resources for the exclusive benefit of the elites.

The gradual subordination of human values to this economic system affects interpersonal relationships, but also our understanding of the world around us. As elites impose their rules of the game, foundational ideas of survival become more pronounced. Many of the actions carried out in the shadows, violating human rights -particularly those directed at people who arrive or attempt to arrive from other countries- are justified, despite their lack of humanity, by a hegemonic affirmation: “our own people first,” or “nationals first.” In this regard, to deny that they are letting migrants die in the Mediterranean -or returning them to countries where human rights are not upheld-, constitutes a new form of fascism, is to be profoundly mistaken. The recent restrictions placed on Médicos sin Fronteras (2024), and other organizations that prevent them from carrying out lifesaving work at sea, represent a form of cooperation

with genocide —not so different from that practiced by classical 20th-century fascism. The same can be said about the impunity surrounding the Tarajal case, more than eleven years after the death of 14 people on the beach of Ceuta due to riot control actions by the Spanish Civil Guard —a fact repeatedly denounced by the Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid (Iñesta, 2025).

Migration, within a dehumanizing context, has become a central issue for the far right: it is no coincidence. According to Enzo Traverso, a defining trait of post-fascism -deeply rooted across its many forms, from neo-Nazi movements to the more “moderate” parties emerging from traditional right-wing groups- is xenophobia (2016). It is this xenophobia, embedded within democratic systems, that ultimately legitimizes political passivity in the face of the migrant tragedy, and enables the normalization of post-truth discourses that frame migration as a central problem, rather than what it truly is: an inevitable phenomenon rooted in contemporary conditions and in the living standards shaped by capitalism.

Despite its apparent clarity, migration has taken root in the post-fascist imaginary, which seeks to adapt fascist ideologies to contemporary realities. A powerful driver in the construction of this ideological bastion is the absence of a positive utopia —a condition synonymous with hopelessness, which provides fertile ground for the imposition of abstract and objectifying norms.

The displacement of utopian hope by a resigned realism facilitates the normalization of state inaction in the Mediterranean -where at least nine people die each day attempting to reach Europe-, and legitimizes the new European Pact on Migration and Asylum, which, as outlined in the 2024 report by the Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid (CEAR), directly violates fundamental human rights.

At the heart of this issue lies the myth that Europe rests upon a unique and unalterable cultural foundation that must be preserved at all costs. This belief legitimizes rhetorical distortions of international law, such as the oxymoronic concept of “non-entry,” which claims that an individual who crosses a border without authorization has, in legal terms, never entered. Such legal fictions are used to justify summary deportations and other practices that violate human dignity.

Although there are occasional critical voices -often aligned with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which has repeatedly criticized Spain for its human rights and civil liberties record, particularly in relation to migration (Hernández, 2025)-, these interventions have not yet led to a shift in dominant perspectives. As such, Europe continues to veer toward policy frameworks rooted in post-fascist logic.

On April 9, 2024, the Spanish Congress of Deputies approved by absolute majority the consideration of a Popular Legislative Initiative (ILP) on Regularization, with the only opposing vote coming from the far-right Vox party. This act stands as a powerful statement that Spain is not necessarily destined to fall into fascist maximalism —such as mass deportation policies currently being implemented in other countries.

Supporting this proposal, which seeks to amend a single article of Organic Law 4/2000 on the rights and freedoms of foreigners in Spain and their social integration, offers a way forward grounded in democratic values and human dignity.

For Jason Stanley, what defines fascism is

Jason Stanley defines fascism by its particular way of dehumanizing specific segments of the population. By excluding them, it diminishes the capacity for empathy among the rest of the citizenry and legitimizes inhumane treatment —ranging from the repression of freedom, mass incarceration, or expulsion to, in extreme cases, mass extermination. (2019, p. 8).

The Culture of Fear: Forms of Subordination

In recent years, we have witnessed the expansion of neoliberal capitalism with scarcely any regulatory mechanisms capable of halting the erosion of the welfare state —the very same welfare state that capitalism once showcased as one of its crowning achievements.

The unrestrained liberalization of markets and the weakening of state authority to impose limits have allowed capitalism to increasingly bypass traditional systems of governance. In their place, an autocracy of economic power emerges, exerting ongoing influence over democratic representatives through mechanisms such as lobbying and other forms of pressure, particularly concerning state-managed debt.

In this complex scenario -where it becomes difficult to determine who truly makes the critical decisions that govern the world- capitalism also reveals its vulnerabilities. These become especially apparent during times of crisis, when it becomes harder to justify the abandonment of society by economic elites. Such moments are often seized by populist movements seeking to capitalize on the disillusionment.

According to authors like Federico Finchelstein (2020), right-wing populism can be understood as a continuation of fascism, albeit in a softer form.

The fascist notions of popular community, strong leadership, and nationhood, served as foundational elements for modern populism after World War II. However, populism has often reformulated or outright rejected these ideas —particularly those linked to the extreme political violence of fascism and its totalitarian subversion of democracy. (Finchelstein, 2018, p. 29).

There is no doubt that the resurgence of populism also poses a threat to capitalism, insofar as it compels the system to respond to demands that may undermine its own inertia. Thus, we find ourselves in a complex and volatile landscape of competing interests, where virtually anything is possible. It is a context in which fascism could reassert itself through its symbolic power, especially given capitalism's increasing inability to offer viable solutions.

Perhaps fascism has already devised its next move: it will seek to turn citizens into fascists -it will want you to be fascist- because you will have come to believe that this is the only way to be protected, the only way the system might defend you.

This is the crux of the matter: the greater the disorder, the deeper the fear; and the more intense the fear, the stronger the perceived need for control. This is how fascism operates. It prepares you to embrace it without realizing that your acceptance stems from fear. And fear is so essential to the spread of fascism that openly aligned parties place "security" at the top of their political agendas. Consider, for example, the program of fascist Spanish party España 2000, which declares: "We uphold that the first human right is security, without which no other right can be realized. Without security, there is no freedom of action or thought" (2025).

What Noam Chomsky once described as a "culture of fear," in reference to how the U.S. government used terrorism to curtail civil liberties, may pale in comparison to the generalized panic that could arise when climate-driven migration becomes inevitable and societies experience a sustained sense of chaos. Could we be on the brink of a Darwinian totalitarianism, as Carlos Taibo (2022) warns in his book *Ecofascism*?

Even though this may sound alarmist, we must pay close attention to how normalized post-fascism will be perceived in the near future, and how, through a kind of semantic transformation, it may don its finest attire in order to be socially accepted. What is at stake is a shift in perception —one that reconstructs the political realities that govern civic life. If fascism has long been seen, particularly in popular discourse, as a top-down imposition of values through authoritarian means, the major shift ahead could be the emergence of a new fascism disguised as the authentic and legitimate defender of popular interests and values.

The key to resisting fascism, following this logic, lies in escaping the distorted perception of reality, rejecting the convulsions of social media, and resisting the magnifying lenses that use fear as their primary trigger. It is within society's power to open windows of hope in the face of the fascist threat, but this collective decision requires diverging from dominant narratives, refusing to yield to the tyranny of popular micro-fascisms, and, above all, finding the courage to declare that humanist principles can be upheld through alternative paths.

Urgent action is needed —specifically, a collective revalidation of universal values capable of halting the spread of new fascisms. This, in turn, demands breaking with the current dynamic in which the individual is subordinated to the system. In other words, reversing the progressive erosion of subjectivity, as Adorno discussed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2018).

From our perspective, three forms of subordination continue to exert pressure on critical thinking and subjective experience, favoring a totalizing abstraction and thus contributing to a state of perpetual

domination—even within democratic systems. The main one among these is the subordination of the subject to the system, in which the primary casualty is social truth—truth grounded in events and understood as a foundational principle of justice.

To properly analyze this issue, we must begin by defining “the system” not as an abstract or symbolic entity but as a coordinated structure that ensures movement without transformation—namely, without the ruling social class relinquishing its privileges. One striking example can be found in housing legislation. Despite the Spanish Constitution’s explicit recognition of the right to decent housing, existing laws consistently fail to uphold this right. On the contrary, they have exacerbated the problem through lack of protection, permissiveness toward abuse, or the wholesale abandonment of housing to the whims of the market.

It is inconceivable that a democracy—whose very definition entails a rejection of new forms of fascism—should tolerate the eviction of families simply because they cannot afford exorbitant rent, or allow the elderly to be forced into homelessness when their homes are acquired by speculative investment funds. And yet this is happening. Even more concerning is the emergence of a new ideological fervor in defense of private property, sometimes through violent means and with tacit approval of vigilante eviction groups operating outside the law—such as the firm Desokupa (Cúneo, 2022).

Enumerating all the ways in which the human being is subordinated to the system would be an endless task. Even when we focus on specific domains—such as the subordination of labor to capital—the patterns remain clear. Predatory capitalism renders us disposable: the one who is not productive must be discarded. As a result, labor is no longer understood as a meaningful contribution to the community, but rather as a mechanism for producing marketable goods. This redefinition undermines a wide array of foundational principles that support not only our environment, but our very sense of what it means to be human.

Establishing a polluting industrial facility in a natural ecosystem—such as in the case of Altri in Galicia, Spain (Bibici, 2025; Muñoz, 2025)—for the sole purpose of enriching private corporations, without regard for environmental destruction or public opposition, is a celebration of capital as the only viable future. Does not this constitute a new form of totalitarianism?

The lie of the culture of fear serves to suppress resistance against subordination, while social movements—particularly antifascist ones—work to reignite this resistance by exposing its underlying mechanisms.

Devaluation of Democracies

We live in a democracy, and breaking the pact of democratic representation would cost us our exit from the theater—a fragile stage of reality in which we see ourselves reflected in an abstract otherness, sparing us the need to confront our own reflection.

In general, one might argue that societies prefer to live under democratic rule rather than any authoritarian regime. However, it is equally true that perceptions of democracy are increasingly deteriorating in many countries. In Spain, for instance, a survey conducted in September 2024 (Fernández) revealed that a majority of citizens believed democracy was in decline. Among the youth, a significant proportion no longer believed in it at all.

This loss of trust in democratic systems can be both a cause and a consequence. On the one hand, it may lead to a diminished sense of representativeness; on the other, it can foster the belief that things might function just as well -or even better- without democracy. In either case, the result is a truncated democracy, dominated by rigid ideologies entrenched in mainstream political parties, leaving little room for genuine public participation in social or political change.

Moreover, when representation is limited to a dominant majority, the risk of further marginalizing already vulnerable populations increases. This includes individuals who fall outside accepted norms of social coexistence —those without proper citizenship, housing, healthcare access, financial stability, or, increasingly, those unable to escape the consequences of climate catastrophe.

The coexistence of late-stage capitalism and post-fascism within democratic frameworks was already noted in 2001 by philosopher and founder of the Green Left party, Gáspár Miklós Tamás. In an article titled Berlusconi, “Haider and the Rise of Post-Fascism”, he stated:

Post-fascism does not require marauding regiments or dictators. This centrist extremism does not overtly threaten the fundamental principles of democratic governance. Liberty, security, and prosperity remain largely intact —at least for the productive majority living in wealthy nations.

On the other hand, aspiring to improve democracy toward a form of governance that actively fosters responsible citizen participation represents progress in all the areas analyzed throughout this article — particularly regarding the quality of information, an issue in which we see no signs of improvement. Societies are not becoming better informed, merely more saturated with information. As previously discussed, the abundance of information sources does not necessarily result in meaningful comparison or critical judgment. There is a growing perception that the more information there is, the harder it becomes to uncover the truth. If the needle remains the same, the haystack keeps growing, to the point of no return —where the effort to distinguish documented objectivity from interest-driven opinion control no longer seems worthwhile.

Amid this confusion, artificial intelligence plays a critical role. Not only can it process human-generated data to “think,” but it may also be reshaping how humans themselves think. Supporting this concern, a 2023 study by psychologists Lucía Vicente and Helena Matute from the University of Deusto in Bilbao

provides evidence that people can inherit biases from artificial intelligence. Are we being conditioned to accept assumptions that ultimately block the possibility of a radical transformation of the system?

Results and Conclusions

As we have observed throughout this article, multiple factors contribute to the distortion of truth and, consequently, pave the way for the establishment of fascist ideas within contemporary societies.

Using the metaphor of microplastics, we might only become aware that we are “consuming oil” after a thorough urine analysis —an analysis that, unfortunately, will never be performed on the general population. The fear is that, if such results were known, people might stop consuming plastic or begin to demand alternatives. In urine, but especially in feces, microfascisms manifest as vile yet mundane acts. It takes little more than turning on the television, listening to certain radio stations, taking a taxi, eavesdropping at a bar, or scrolling through a smartphone to find oneself drenched in a wave of negative emotions reeking of fascism.

It is clear that there are explicit outbreaks we cannot afford to ignore, with leading figures of libertarian capitalism -such as Milei and Trump- serving as prominent examples. But it would be misleading to think of this as a new or manageable phenomenon. As we have discussed, fascist-adjacent ideas have long been operating within the judiciary, the media, and the collective imagination, and they now threaten to spread like an oil slick.

In *Lo que está en juego*, Philipp Blom warns that “admirers of authoritarian rebellion have something to lose, and they perceive that potential loss as an immediate threat” (2021, pp. 130-131). Much like in the 1930s, the rise of fascism is supported by a popular force that also feels endangered.

This mad dash toward nowhere should compel us to reflect on the future we are building, and to what extent the harmful manipulation of what we perceive as truth is shaping that future. Traditionally, mutual aid networks have built communities grounded in shared experiences. Perhaps therein lies a way out of the labyrinth —a path that could allow us to break free from market fundamentalism and the blindness of those in power. Let us open the fortress from within, to let the landscape in, to allow clarity to dispel every attempt at linguistic manipulation, and to let the words that truly matter rise to the surface, unambiguous, and victorious.

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