DIGITAL POPULISM AND FASCISM: THE DEMOCRATIC REGRESSION IN POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

POPULISMO E FASCISMO DIGITAIS: O RETROCESSO DEMOCRÁTICO NAS COMUNICAÇÕES POLÍTICAS NO SÉCULO XXI

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ABSTRACT: The advancement of new Technologies has enabled greater participation and content production by citizens, with effects on digital media, especially on social networks. As a result, an effect of considerable impact on democratic issues, is the populist and fascist discourses that are not only externalized by political leaders, but also by ordinary citizens. From this, using the hypothetical-deductive method and the bibliographic research technique, with a qualitative approach, this study analyzes the rise of authoritarian discourses through digital media and what is their impact on democracies. Results: new technologies, while having great potential for the promotion of democracy, carry a great risk to the democratic State. It is necessary to think of solutions to this problem that do not limit people's freedom of expression, privacy and intimacy on the internet, but also that human rights and democracy, which are the central bases of a society, are not at risk. fairer with respect for plurality. Populist discourse and fascism must be contained, as generally they have young people with low education, or even in people with a lack of information, as their main sources of adepts, for which a lot has happened through misinformation. It is necessary, then, to think about education, or re-education, not only personal, but also digital and more humanized.

Keywords: democracy; social media; populism; fascism.

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RESUMO: O avanço das novas tecnologias possibilitou maior participação e produção de conteúdo por parte dos cidadãos, surtindo efeitos nos meios digitais, principalmente nas redes sociais. Em razão disso, um efeito de bastante impacto nas questões democráticas, são os discursos populistas e fascistas que não são externalizados unicamente por líderes políticos, mas também por cidadãos comuns. A partir disso, através do método hipotético-dedutivo, e da técnica de pesquisa bibliográfica, com uma abordagem qualitativa, o presente estudo visa analisar a ascensão dos discursos autoritários através dos meios digitais e qual o seu impacto nas democracias. Resultados: as novas tecnologias, ao mesmo tempo em que apresentam grande potencial para a promoção da democracia, ela traz consigo um grande risco ao Estado democrático. Há de se pensar em soluções a esse problema que não limitem a liberdade de expressão, a privacidade e a intimidade das pessoas na internet, mas também, que não se deixe em risco os direitos humanos e a democracia, que são bases centrais de uma sociedade mais justa com respeito na pluralidade. O discurso populista e o fascismo devem ser contidos, pois geralmente têm sua principal fonte de adeptos em jovens de baixa escolaridade, ou até em pessoas com falta de informação, pelo que muito se tem acontecido através da desinformação. É necessário então, pensar numa educação, ou, reeducação, não tão somente pessoal, mas como digital e mais humanizada.

Palavras-Chave: democracia; redes sociais; populismo; fascismo.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. The rise of populism in the digital media. 3. Digital Fascism? 4. Conclusion. 5. References.

1. INTRODUCTION

When it comes to the new technologies present in everyone's daily life, it is also referring to the phenomenon of globalization, which, among its various effects — which become almost impossible to escape — present the easy to information, communication, knowledge, networks, as well as to everything that happens around the world. Currently, through the use of the internet, it is possible to observe what happens in another continent in real time, or to maintain contacts and friendships with people in distant places. These possibilities might have been difficult to imagine a few years ago, but this is what happens with the technological innovation process added to the globalizing effect, which ends up reaching everyone in the most varied ways.

The rise of populism in digital political communications and the possibility of developing a new kind of fascism (as well as other forms of extremism and authoritarianism) is an object of research of extreme relevance for legal studies — especially for the Sociology of Law and Constitutional Law. Understanding the ways in which communications in society contribute to forming normative discourses with great potential to influence institutionalized decision-making processes (election of representatives, popular support for possible institutional changes that occur in the development of public policies and in the drafting of new laws) is fundamental for both disciplines, as it is about visualizing and understanding how society can mobilize the political class, influence the theoretical common sense of jurists (who also judge based on emotions and ideology), or how political discourse can be maneuvered in order to reinforce the interests of those who have the capacity to manipulate social networks (through bots, bubble filters, fake news spread and emotional persuasion resources).

The problem that guided the conduction of this research can be described in the following question: what contradictions to the political discourse has the popularization of access to social networks been causing? The hypothesis that provisionally answers this problem can be traced as follows: new information and communication technologies (ICTs) have enabled a new field of action for humans — just analyze the current facility for quick and simple acquisition of knowledge, for example. However, technological evolution has at least two types of contradictory effects: in addition to the positive possibility of greater access to knowledge, debates, discussions, ideas, enabling a broad democratization through communication on social networks, a negative, dark side emerges, because the greater opening to exposition of ideas also leads to the spread of anti-democratic, populist, extremist, authoritarian and fascist ideas.

In light of this, the present study is concerned with studying the effects that new technologies can bring on current democracies, looking at the negative side of the

internet and social communication networks, such as Facebook or Twitter, which can be used as means of propagating excluding speeches with totalitarian bias. To achieve this challenge, the development of this article was divided into two sections, each of them corresponding to one of its specific objective. Its first section, then, aims to study what characteristics the populist discourse presents, among which: its origin and its increasing prominence in social networks; the characteristics of individuals and organizations that tend to propagate this type of mass thinking; the means used for such propagation; and which means of identification are usually found in the profiles of those who reproduce populism on social media.

The second section, by its turn, focuses on observing the authoritarian and nationalist bias on which fascism consists. The elements that base the fascist ideological current are considered, starting with an analysis of the behavior of its leaders, with the dissemination of fascist communication, tracing its evolution until today, finally arriving at what currently it is called “digital fascism”, which has undergone some changes from traditional fascism, which was previously only reproduced by political leaders, but now also by ordinary citizens with access to the available new technological means.

Methodologically, the research has a exploratory nature. The hypothetical-deductive procedure method was used, with a qualitative and transdisciplinary approach, and the bibliographic-documentary research technique.

2. THE RISE OF POPULISM IN THE DIGITAL MEDIA

In order to understand how the rise of populism occurs with the use of ICTs, it is necessary to verify what this ideology consists on, how it presents itself and what are the elements that specifically characterize it. For this, the elements of populism and how it gained relevance in digital media, mainly through social networks, will be analyzed in this section.

Populist practices can be presented in different ways, but generally following specific elements and patterns. In the search for the identification of a populist communication style, it is noted that there are two distinct styles of behavior. The first of them is the identification with individuals who follow a pattern of behavior of the “champion of the people” type, a defender of the people against the elite, and who present themselves in a simple and informal way. The second one, on the other hand, identifies with the posture of the “man on the street”, who explores the desires, fears and specific policies from a specific place of performance (BRACCIALE; MARTELLA, 2017).

Populism consists on creating an exclusive narrative about friends and enemies, seeking to differentiate between the real people and the “rest” — which is not limited to the population, because the populist politicians end up presenting themselves as those who represent the real people, in the face of the rest of the politicians, who would not be representatives of the people. Populists claim not to represent only 99% of a people, but their totality, as the rest end up being relegated to an exclusion zone, given that the populist movement is anti-pluralist. Many isolated facts and news can be chosen to strengthen support for populism, which simplifies cases and circumstances, or important facts (HENDRICKS; VESTERGAARD, 2019).

It is like the example of what the current president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, came to declare in the midst of a Covid-19 pandemic, stating that the disease would be “just a little cold”, simplifying the seriousness of the event that has left numerous extreme damages around the world (SAKAMOTO, 2020). That would be the simplification of an extremely important cause, putting the lives of the entire population at risk in order to maintain a discourse that he thinks about the people, their survival through subsistence through work, and that, for that, it is necessary to develop a strong economy, even in the midst of a global health crisis.

In addition, differences between right-wing and left-wing populisms can be seen, which follow different ideological currents and discourses. This difference is

perceived by the fact that the right-wing populist ideal follows an extremely exclusive model, inciting, for example, xenophobia; in the left-wing populist practice, society and the people are built through a logic which is contrary to immoral privileges, usually being a position taken by extremely greedy bankers, doubtful entrepreneurs, as well as corrupt politicians, who use their condition to exploit the people (GERBAUDO, 2018) — although such characteristics cannot be elevated to the condition of accuracy, since the speeches typical of the populist right (based on the xenophobic nationalist) can also be used opportunely by left populists, and vice versa.

Politicians who are closer to the leftist ideology tend to see economic inequality as the main agenda of the problems that need to be faced by a society, being their target much more represented by the economic elite than by their opposing candidates. As for right-wing populists, it is clear that they are more likely to follow the bias of a conservative-nationalist right-wing segment, which, in the political system, are contrary to neoliberal and post-materialist values, and point out as a target not the economic elite, but, more often, the political and cultural elites (which belong to the media, for example) (MAURER; DIEHL, 2020).

A populist right-wing phenomenon (which is increasingly on the rise) is noticeable in the last important parliamentary and presidential elections that have taken place in recent years around the world — for example, with the choice of a small majority that resulted in the “Brexit”; Trump's election in the United States; among others. This phenomenon has had several levels of success among the population, with their extremist and nationalist views that are now not only part of the elite, but also find a strong support among voters in general. The massive support that these parties have been receiving is a current reality that has been changing the political scenario and it must be analyzed (RASHKOVA, 2020).

Among the multiple reasons for the current crisis of confidence in democratic politics, there is one that deserves to be highlighted: for a long time, politicians of liberal democracies were burdened with too many tasks and responsibilities, giving the

impression that all (or, at least, good part of) growing individual expectations should be transformed into rights. As this task could not be satisfied, a crisis in democratic institutions was unleashed (MASALA, 2020, p. 195-196). This crisis has motivated the spread of populist ideas, which promise to meet individual desires dissatisfied due to the opacity of democratic political institutions to obliterate the achievement of popular will. The dynamics of trust in politics, thus, have moved away from trust in the dynamics of the increasing complexity of democratic institutions and their political proposals, getting closer and closer to the simplistic similarity between the leader and the people.

In the current society, characterized by the use of communication and disintermediation technologies, the possibility of expressing personal opinions and the illusion of contributing to the decision-making processes in an unfiltered way (by institutions and processes) are expanding. And the new populisms, through leverage on social media, are suitable for a feeling of closeness between the leader and the people and for the illusion of reconstructing the lost social cohesion. Thus, they are ambiguous and dangerous attempts to deny the “old” confidence mechanisms, replacing them with new technological dynamics of confidence building that seem more instinctive and superficial.

It must be taken into account that it is practically impossible to evade the effects of globalization today — including with regard to the use of ICTs. Thus, with technological advances and the impact of on communications due to the accessibility of an increasing number of people to digital media, populist speeches have also gained a huge space online, mainly through social networks like Facebook and Twitter. For that, it is necessary to be explained how the new technologies work and how they are being used.

With the evolution and ease of access to digital media, it is now possible to speak of a kind of crypto-democracy — where all the people could directly vote in general elections, or in general legislative processes, through smartphones connected

to the internet, in a safe network protected by blockchain technology, and which would not rely into State-centric mechanisms. This term is used to define a set of applications of the so-called blockchain technology for democratic choices. But, what is blockchain? It is a range of technologies that combines an asymmetric cryptography, a type of network that connects point to point, or a voting mechanism to obtain a certain consensus and a data processing device, which gives rise to a decentralized and immutable public book for transfer, as well as store property rights (BERG, 2017).

The decentralized system known as blockchain sometimes ended up being associated with technopopulism. Given this, there is a need to say that the manifests belonging to the blockchain are not conceptualized as technological documents, nor are they even characterized as programmatic documentation, but end up being seen as a simple communication strategy that resembles populist discourses, so that it ends up bringing some supporters closer, but in return, it ends up generating a polarization. If the promises of the said decentralized technology are analyzed, key points of the populist rhetoric can be found — that is, the promise of a break with an old order, or the empowerment of the people, passing on a sense of freedom where the power of the elite, as well as the occurrence of the replacement of committed institutions that end up being fundamental to the blockchain manifests. However, it is emphasized that such promises referred to have very little support in reality (GIKAY; STĂNESCU, 2019).

The crypto-democracy englobes two main themes, with the aim of training the elected politicians. The first specific point is that this democratic system aims to reduce the division between the people of the elite. In order to reformulate representatives as delegates, crypto-democracy offers a direct mechanism, where voters would be able to exercise a control center over those who are their delegates. In this way, the same voters could have the choice to experience more refined control over the political system. And, in a second specific aspect, voters could also form

political coalitions according to their own views, thus escaping from “standards”, characterizing a more “personalized” attitude (BERG, 2017).

In fact, crypto-democracy can have many advantages, even better representation. One of the advantages of digital crypto-democracy is that it opens up possibilities for greater direct popular participation — because one of the current problems in many cases (especially in countries where voting is not mandatory) is the low participation of the population in the polls. With the convenience that crypto-democracy can offer, greater popular involvement would be encouraged by the fact that people could participate in voting directly from their homes, with electronic systems encrypted by blockchain technology, which would prevent distortion of results because of the action of hackers, for example (WÜNSCH; FERREIRA, 2016).

But this direct popular participation through crypto-democracy apparatuses can present some dangers and risks to democracy itself, as it happens in the case of greater visibility to populist discourses through the use of social networks. The tools of democratic innovation (such as e-democracy, particularly a truly deliberative e-democracy) can reinforce democratic participation; however, they often do the opposite, becoming effective enhancers (directly or indirectly) of populist tendencies (DE BLASIO; SORICE, 2018, p. 12). That is, in the same way that democratic innovations can improve citizen participation, it can become a dangerous tool in the hands of populists.

This technological advance shows that digital activism is a way that puts politics and technology at a crucial point of discussion. It is notable that digital technology strengthens the idea of political movements acquiring the possibility of becoming more personalized and less controlled by organizational centers, distributing different forms of messages, ideas, images in the face of a technological and cultural dimension (GERBAUDO, 2017).

It can be seen, then, that politicians tend to adhere to social networks, mainly due to the fact that it is much more practical to disseminate populist ideas through

social media (mainly Facebook and Twitter) than by traditional media (which have filtering possibilities for information by editors, journalists and columnists), making it even ignored, and politicians can direct their message to the target groups and still achieve a wide reach (ERNEST, 2019). “[...] Social networksites, such as Twitter, provide (populist) politicians with a platform to express disinformation to strategically attack the politicians they oppose” (HAMELEERS, 2020, p. 154). Thus, populist politicians end up using these platforms to disseminate misinformation, strategically attacking those who oppose their interests.

Technological development and the consequent proposal for decentralized information offered by the internet, then, open up a new option for the news market, breaking the monopoly of traditional media as producers and distributors of information. The easy access to information, through digital texts, audio and videos, completely changed the conditions of news production. Now, the consumer is also a potential content producer. Anyone who has a simple way of accessing the digital medium through the use of any software for the manipulation of images, audios and videos, can create media content that previously needed a series of equipment and approval procedures. Social networks have made it much easier to spread news, even more because they have simpler infrastructure, which makes it easy to use and spread messages and news. Users (identified, anonymously, or through false profiles) can now spread information in gigantic proportions (HENDRICKS; VESTERGAARD, 2019).

Populist practices have acquired a strong momentum around the world, mainly because social media contribute to the opportunity for the mass dissemination of ideals, so that populism has obtained a certain “reinforcement”, or “success”, because it has entered in an environment of high visibility, in an attractive way, not only for politicians, but also for citizens who, in many cases, inject a series of populist content into online networks (HAMELEERS, SCHMUCK, 2017). Twitter, for example, is a social network where people can communicate using a space of 280 characters,

exposing their own thoughts. There is a possibility of a wide reach through the use of “like” and “retweet” tools that can come to boost a particular publication. Through this platform, the possibility of promoting a type of interactive communication opens up, as an adequate communication structure is offered for horizontal and non-mediated exchanges, that is, it facilitates communication between politicians and citizens. However, this is not what happens, because in many cases, Twitter is not used in a dialogical way, but rather, for the repercussion of ideas in a large audience without any filter. There are no exchanges of information, considerations of adverse points of view, and Twitter ends up being used by populists simply to harass journalists, critics, social media users and citizens, as well as traditional media as a whole. It becomes a tool to attack any possibility of plurality of speeches, being massacred all those who diverge from populist ideals, as can be seen in the current times by the social networks of some political leaders around the world (WAISBORD; AMADO, 2017)

Social media, for right-wing populism, is meant to normalize, expand and reshape many of its extremist commitments. Furthermore, it is known that this has an immeasurable impact, considering that in the era of digital broadcasting, a mere tweet, of up to 280 characters, can turn into a “political treaty” that amplifies nationalist indignation and gives voice to a growing hostility, based on that xenophobic discourse against immigrants and asylum seekers, for exemple (GOVIL; BAISHYA 2018).

The populist use of Twitter demonstrates a preference for communication without filters in a form of representation, not as interaction. The sheer number of hostile and aggressive tweets against journalists and critic citizens is harmful in the eyes of what democracy really needs. Although digital technologies can be used for purposes of dialogue and public empowerment, populist administrations have neither done nor shown interest in this aspect — as there is no interest in increasing communicative relations with and between citizens. Using Twitter to disseminate information (including false information), shape news agendas and focus on the

visibility of the presidency is not something that is best expected for digital democracy (WAISBORD; AMADO, 2017).

It is necessary to remember that the use of social media applications presents a wide territory for speeches, mainly for the right-wing and extreme hostile populist actors. Analyzing this contact with politics, it is clear that many of the cases of followers and those who produce populist speeches on the internet occur through adolescents and young people. That is, they generally are the greatest followers and disseminators of populist discourse with a right-wing ideological bias. Their profiles, in most cases, fit the standard of low schooling and male students, with a strong participatory intention. It is a fact that following a candidate or political party in a social network system does not require much effort in terms of time and energy (HEISS; MATTHES, 2017).

This opens space for a discussion on how populist discourses work in networks and how they establish relations with traditional media. For it is noted that a strong wave of “devaluation” and “de-characterization” of the traditional media (usually by right-wing populism) has been plaguing the media all over the planet. It ends up disregarding all information from traditional media and taking into account only what is said — usually by a political leader — without any filter, in his/her social network. Many use the discourse that the media is “against the government” or that it intends to “stagnate” the country's growth, as it only aims “attack” political (populist) leaders.

Currently, the dissemination of disinformation is frequent, a mixture of something with possibilities of being true and elements of something doubtful, distorted, with no other evidence than its own communication (through a tweet, a post, a meme, etc.). In this way, it becomes, at the same time, more difficult for those who are consuming certain news to know the truth of the facts, and much easier to adhere to what best suits their political position. The so-called motivated reasoning explains this event, in a way that the receiver uses to his/her advantage only the facts that support his/her position and ideology. And when the misinformation happens

successively, the consequence can be very serious to democracy (HENDRICKS; VESTERGAARD, 2019). What is very often explained is that citizens dissatisfied with the traditional press raise an extreme concern for democratic public spheres. It is a well-known fact that citizens with populist attitudes have different orientations regarding the media. This behavior can mean an indication of significant political change, due to what is desired by some parts of the “people” (KIRKZH; FROIO; SCHROEDER, 2020).

Generally users of social networks who adhere to right-wing populism decorate the visual part of their social media profiles with national flags, showing photos with specific characteristics, sharing articles on conspiracy sites, reports on criminal aliens (in order to encourage that exclusionary practice and xenophobic), links to unreasonable petitions and even a form of communication through memes demonstrating when they feel love for their own country (KRÄMER, 2017). Again, citing in the case of Brazil as an example, mainly after the 2018 presidential elections, it became much more noticeable such a great wave of adaptation of profiles to populist characteristics. On Facebook, people used “green and yellow” themes in their profiles, along with the use of photos wearing the shirt of the Brazilian Football team, as well as the mass sharing of conspiracy posts and a great spread of so-called fake news, along with a great devaluation of national media. On Twitter, another widely used medium, it was no different. The profile names in this social network were often written with the use of the Brazilian flag, and with little finger emojis (representing the symbol of “revolvers”, which is very often used as a symbol by President Bolsonaro).

Finally, it is worth mentioning the way in which this practice continues to have visibility. This is due not only to participation in networks, but also to the algorithms used by them, which capture data from what users express to like (in Facebook vocabulary, what they “like”, “share” and/or comments; on Twitter, what someone replies by retweeting). These algorithms capture the content most consumed by users and end up giving a kind of suggestion for more publications that refer to the same

type of content already reproduced and used by the user — in what is called a “bubble”.

In view of these findings, the trends of right-wing populism must be analyzed, for example, by linking to the means that it resists to cultural change, to the media and to changes in political fields that occur regardless of populist challenges and discursive opportunities. It is necessary to note that the internet can contribute to the formation of an international network of right-wing populist movements that have become increasingly effective and, perhaps also more radical and violent (GIKAY; STĂNESCU, 2019). It so happens that, with the rise of the internet and the ease with which people demonstrate and expose their thoughts, political criteria and different specific points of what they believe, it has not only opened space for populism, but also for other practices that undermine democracy, such as case of digital fascism. Therefore, the next section will focus on studying the rise of fascist discourse through the media.

3. DIGITAL FASCISM?

In the current historical moment, a neoliberal fascism, which is a unique political formation that haunts the world, occupies the center of power in several countries, such as Brazil and the USA (GIROUX, 2020, p. 10). To challenge this fascism, it is necessary to rethink how dominant politics resonates populism's simplified speeches, and how it easily accommodates the clamor for “strong men” taking over governments. Thus, a critical analysis of the educational conditions that allow individuals to renounce their sense of agency, their modes of identification and their dreams in favor of the ideological and political forces of neoliberal fascism must be carried out.

It is the education that must be rethought, therefore, as a means of allowing forms of self-formation that provide people with conditions to resist fascist and

neoliberal mentalities, which are inevitably present in cacophonous democratic political modes of governance. The ideological and economic functioning of power must be exposed, and the need to engage in direct action, in order to shut down the machinery of death, must be embraced collectively. In Chile, Puerto Rico, Hong Kong, Ecuador and Iraq (among others), people are organizing and rebelling against the measures of corruption and brutal austerity guided by neoliberalism, thus producing a fierce criticism of capitalism and building a new understanding of politics and mass resistance. Such protests occur at a crucial moment, when forces of militarism, State violence and availability are on the march.

In addition to digital populism, the evolution of the internet and the accessibility of social networks have also allowed fascism to present itself online, without any filters, through posts or tweets and in the most diverse forms that the interactive tools which social networks can offer. First, it must be said that authoritarianism is not simply a political movement that has its own ideology. In fact, it is a way of imposing policies or a set of ideas, through the use of methods that are characterized by coercive leadership, against a certain group or people (JORDAN, 2020). Fascism, basically, consists of an ideology based on strong and charismatic leadership with massive support, with the fallacious objective of guaranteeing a domestic order (within a State) and restoring national grandeur (WEYLAND, 2017).

When it comes to fascism, the discussion is about undemocratic and authoritarian regimes. The links between these determined regimes, present a series of different patterns and characteristics, which can vary depending on the objectives and motivations found within each of these movements. Authoritarian, totalitarian regimes, which do not have a well-defined ideology, seek to pursue pragmatic self-interests, without any clearly defined objective, which tend to limit the dissemination of instrumental innovations, concentrate all cooperation on enterprises in a defensive way. A totalitarian system that uses an ideology that seeks to inspire the rise of such regimes, ends up promoting and proliferating its system for a large number of States,

aiming to seek the dismantling, or the replacement of liberal democracies, which in fascist discourse would always be weak and decadent, and should be replaced by an autocratic regime.

It is necessary to say that fascist dictatorships, unlike other dictatorial systems, had, at the beginning of the 20th century, the intention to get rid of the institutions and elites of the old order. Furthermore, this movement was characterized by being revolutionary and reactionary, as they defended an ideological bias of some more traditional views about gender, family, as well as in many other points of personal and community life, at the same time that aimed at a change, a profound transformation of its citizens and their respective societies. Fascist movements were generally considered to be modern phenomena, as they resulted from mass political support, providing ideological justifications for their actions, presenting their leaders as representatives of the “people” (BERMAN, 2019).

Following this logic, analyzing the beginning of the fascist movement in Italy, it is clear that it started from the moment when the Italian State had lost control over some parts of its territory and, consequently, many citizens had lost their faith in the main State political institutions. In this way, the aforementioned regime began to gain strength, as it was a movement of nationalists, unionists and veterans of the First World War who were dissatisfied with the alleged weakness of the Italian State. Thus, they began to spread the idea that they could offer a strong state, capable of uniting the Italian population, as well as obtaining a strong position before international society. This is not difficult to imagine given the circumstances that Italy's extreme regionalism presented, as the different regions of the country agreed with this ideal of the unification of its population for the creation of a strong state. Benito Mussolini, leader of fascism in Italy, after coming to power, faced some challenges, such as dismantling the remnants of the former liberal democracy, being able to dominate total control over the fascist movement and also creating that strong, internationally

recognized State, who would not bow to others. Despite having been very successful in the first two issues, it did not succeed in creating a strong State (BERMAN, 2019).

Fascist leaders like Mussolini and Hitler went to great lengths to win supporters outside their respective States, in order to spread fascism to a large number of foreign countries and thus, consequently, increase their power. The way used to achieve the objective was through a quantity of mass propaganda, aiming to exalt fascist characteristics and to seek visibility for their supposed fallacious achievements, such as economic growth and development, advantageous social programs and a position respect within the scope of international society. It is a fact that fascist governments targeted ethnic groups and groups of diverse ideology. These efforts were not limited only to countries on the European continent, but fascist practices were also found in countries in South America. In Brazil, for exemple, the Rome ambassador offered information on the recent information (at the time) regarding innovations that were happening in the Italian territory for the then Brazilian President Getúlio Vargas, who soon obtained support from a fascist movement created in Brazil, Integralismo, so that it aimed at a coup to impose an authoritarian regime (WEYLAND, 2017).

In fact, to understand how a country joins a fascist movement, leaving aside a democracy, one can go back to the example of what happened in Italy, in the early 1920s. With the First World War, the Italian population was devastated, and the State was on the verge of chaos. For, in fact, the country entered the period between wars with serious problems, showing a weak State, due to the results and consequences of the First Great War. As a result of this, the Italian population was divided, considering the humiliating treatment that the Allied countries had with their State, resulting in a strong wave of criticism that blamed democracy and its elites for the effect that had occurred. In addition, a strong economic crisis hit the country, causing even more unrest in society. Faced with this troubled period in Italian history, the fascist movement was opportunistic and took advantage of the moment of imbalance created by the failures of existing elites and institutions and popular dissatisfaction. With that,

fascism emerged with the promise of restoring order, protecting private property, controlling the excesses promoted by capitalism and rebuilding the Italian State, so that it would become extremely strong. In addition, many elites have also come to entrust the restoration of order to the fascist movement, in order to eliminate the so-called “communist threat”. The fact is that fascism has not achieved any of those goals of making a state strong, not even that of being recognized as a power in international society (BERMAN, 2019).

The most striking features found in the fascist movement are (FIELITZ; MARCKS, 2019, p. 2): the perception of a community in danger of extinction, of a community threatened by foreigners, many prejudiced statements in relation to ethnic, racial and religious diversity as the main characteristic of fascist phenomena that happen around the planet, and a state that needs restructuring, reorganization, renaissance, in short, by extraordinary means.

Globalization and its respective effects have allowed the dissemination of much more information in technological circles. The initial milestone of the internet is Web 1.0, being that, in this period, the existing relationship was much more passive between the user and the Internet. There was almost no interference in the content of the web pages by the common user (WÜNSCH; FERREIRA, 2016, p. 105). But that became completely different when the Web 2.0 arrived, with which the ordinary citizen, as a simple user, started to produce content for the Internet in an extremely overwhelming way. The pages started to promote interaction between all those who joined the social networks, where it is allowed that more content is made available by the platforms themselves. Companies end up using cookies in order to adapt their advertisements according to users’ standards.

It is easy to see that, nowadays, due to technological advances together with the phenomenon of globalization, there are many ways to access information in the most varied ways and in the simplest and fastest ways. The contemporary question, then, is not to find something to read, or any other way to get information, but to find time to

read or even analyze the materials that may be at disposal (HENDRICKS; VESTERGAARD, 2019).

Every day there is a large amount of data generated on the behavior of users on the internet, either through cookies (which, even, many sites warn about the use of cookies), or other tracking systems that are not noticeable. In addition, data is collected through the most diverse ways, from surveys, pages that the user accesses, social media, e-mails and the most diverse consumption patterns. Even if in the applications, or any other platform, data such as gender, age, place of residence, etc. are not indicated. it is possible for this information to be analyzed accurately, based on a series of online behaviors that the user demonstrates. And that knowledge about this data can be very valuable in terms of marketing. This is one of the risks of collecting this data: they can be traded in a type of market, where information about citizens can be very valuable. Given the situation of the media and many companies that are on the online platforms, it is clear that the information that ends up being collected is used for the purpose of proposing ads for each user in their individuality, and these ads arrive presenting users' needs, interests and even the most varied types of positions. In other words, users are being monitored for the purpose of making an economic profit.

It is easy to see how the algorithms work, for example, if the user accesses an online sales site and searches for a product: easily he/she find ads about that product or similar ones. That is, from a pattern of researched interest, at a given moment, there is the possibility of advertisements appearing that reflect your interest from a quantity of data already collected. In fact, people end up not even caring about what may happen to their data, and end up turning their attention and focus on shared content. Thus, just as there was an opening in social media for populist speeches, the internet also made it possible for fascist speeches to spread on the world wide web through various forms and with great ease due to the large amount of social networks and applications that aim at the most varied forms of relationships.

In order to understand how these authoritarian fallacies spread, usually in a gigantic and absurd proportion through digital media, the discussion about what digital fascism really is is a central point. Several actors tend to employ digital strategies for the spread of fears (and some elements that act as a catalyst for specific fears) and fascist discourse in general (FIELITZ; MARCKS, 2019, p. 2). Thus, it can be said that aspects of an agency structure are found in social media, so that they will allow a better understanding of how digital fascism works.

Fascism in technological means can occur in several ways, sometimes even covering more personalized characteristics, sometimes due to the use of different types of applications, or apps, along with technological advances, people started to use these tools that would start a process to set your own preferences. However, it is necessary to distinguish what these preferences are and what is called micro-fascism, that “individual fascism” present in social networks, where there is an intolerance with the difference from the other.

Micro-fascism is not translated into great political polarities; it is rather the oppressive tendency of any individual, regardless of political polarity goals, although they are intersected with some frequency. In fact, it is very common for people to completely ignore the fact that someone follows a micro-fascist line. Often, the figure of this profile is found in different places, such as families, friends, etc. Among young people, it is possible to see that — following an example of the modernization of micro-fascism — it is the analysis of something that agrees or disagrees with politics with its own political vision, with a series of online political rules among this group. It is to say that, in online media, not only in matters of political vision, but even in relationship applications, it is possible to perceive this despotic behavior, which reduces the capacity for mutual understanding, without respecting the wishes of different people to collide with themselves. This is an issue that must be seen from the ethical or political side (PENNEY, 2016).

It is noted that the freedom that social media brings to communication can be very worrying, due to the lack of control over the fascist and/or populist content produced and reproduced, and how people use these media. Once this great force of human empowerment and liberation is acclaimed, all digital tools related to digital communication allow the setting of precedents for people to conduct research, as they have numerous forms of access, accumulate information and also process the most varied types of information (DIAMOND, 2019, p. 20). It is a great positive point to have this access to information and communication in a democratic way. However, people can quickly become a major threat to democratic stability, as well as to freedom itself and other fundamental rights.

In emerging technological issues, it is not only the totalitarian political parties that gain space on the network, but mainly the fascist individuals. It turns out that everything that is published on the internet can be easily accessed. Thus, an authoritarian government can have a certain type of control over the citizens, knowing who has a favorable position and who has a position contrary to the imposed system, analyzing by the individual online activities.

With the advent of the digital age, a certain “postmodern totalitarianism” emerges, which consists of a form of social control and censorship by the State through the administration of information from citizens. Those who avoid behaviors that disrespect the ideological issues of the party, as well as its leaders, can “take advantage” of this modern society and “reap the rewards” of it. It happens that those who show any kind of aversion, or simply question the State system, may suffer severe consequences (DIAMOND, 2019).

Furthermore, digital fascism still has several other characteristics, which can be identified in modern typing societies as: mass surveillance; unethical posture; certain social engineering; compliance through force; propaganda and censorship; a “benevolent” dictatorship; evaluation and analysis of people and, finally; the relativization of human rights. With the easy proliferation of everything that is put on

the world wide web, digital fascism has reached immeasurable dimensions, putting at risk gems like democracy, freedom, and human dignity. Arguments are often heard trying to justify this digital authoritarian practice, as a supposed need to combat terrorism, cyber threats and climate change, were the main guidelines used as a fallacy to invade the privacy and rights of each individual (HELBING, 2019).

Traditional media actors generally have a moral duty to protect democratic values and human rights rather than being an active pawn in the dissemination and normalization of a racist and nativist neofascist discourse. However, moral resistance against neofascism and its provocative policies is an integral part of the polarizing strategy (media versus “the people”) of neofascist communication and feeds its interconnected discourse of victimization — and the threat of “the other”, conveyed in the message of the traditional media, would try to prevent the neo-fascist agenda, identified as the “will of the people” (CAMMAERTS, 2020, p. 12-13). It is necessary, therefore, to reflect about ways to avoid accepting the provocation constantly launched by neofascists to produce an emotional response of indignation and moral consternation. There is also an urgent need to develop ways to make the public and citizens aware of criticism, thereby increasing ways to detect false news and propaganda, thus denaturalizing the neofascist discourse.

But this responsibility cannot weigh only on the shoulders of citizens and individuals. Today’s media business models and practices, which fuel controversy, drama and indignation, must be questioned, which tends to lead to more clicks, shares, engagement and content creation. Furthermore, social media companies (Facebook, Google, etc.) tend to position themselves neutrally in relation to public discourse, claiming to protect freedom of expression, while financially profiting from neofascist actors and political parties. Thus, the social media platforms themselves are the new speech mediators, but with much less responsibility and negating the normative responsibilities that many traditional media and journalists tend to adhere to in a democracy.

Digital fascism is only gaining ground because fascist parties are not currently the main driving forces for mass production of authoritarian content, but digital culture prone to fascism, which has its emergence on social networks themselves (such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.). Thus giving rise to a discussion of how to contain these practices of authoritarian bias. Fielitz (2019, p. 3) believes that it is a paradox, in which “it is not simply ‘not to tolerate the intolerant’, but of being intolerant of (liberal) structures producing intolerance”. This means that it is not just a question of not tolerating the intolerant, but of being intolerant of those structures that facilitate and produce intolerance itself.

In fact, the democratic system runs some risks in the face of this great wave of extremist positions through social networks. The misuse of individuals’ data (which are used to personalize information) will have catastrophic consequences for society as a whole. For a totalitarian, authoritarian State, this type of information can be used to identify those who are in favor or against the government and sanction them before they even exercise their rights. To combat this imminent danger, it is necessary to guarantee and invest in democratic structures of use for powerful cyber infrastructures, of scientific use by interdisciplinary teams; ethical use with respect to the prevalence of human rights and human dignity; and in decentralized cybersecurity accompanied by secure personal data storage (HELBING, 2019).

Democratic societies with rational-legal authority may have the ability to regulate and control new technologies and especially what happens in the context of social networks and any other means of communication (GLASSMAN, 2019, p. 159). However, it should be noted that democratic nation-states are already seeking to limit and regulate the use of some applications and websites such as Google, Apple, Facebook, Instagram, Amazon, Twitter and other social networks.

In the age of social media, the digital structures of the masses can produce a new perception focused on and prone to fascism, making fascist parties more evident and directing a new driving force. There is no way to rule out the fact that the internet

has given fascism a new impetus: from the alternative right to identity, from “shitposting” (usually meme posts) to manipulation tactics. It is clear, obviously, that they are different techniques that violate traditional policy patterns, allowing fascism to engage digital subcultures that increasingly influence the platforms for interpersonal interactions. With this proliferation of fascism in the digital environment, society faces an increasingly present dilemma (FIELITZ; MARCKS, 2019).

Digital fascism appears to be a more social or emerging phenomenon than simply political. It is not just a question of fascist parties that are spreading dangerous situations to justify and maintain their authoritarian practices and policies, but also a digital cultural issue, based on hatred, on an intolerance that has been increasingly present in the networks social. In order to combat digital fascism, it should not focus only on intolerant actors, but intolerance must be directed against the structures that produce and allow fascist practice to gain space in the digital and social — even if technological — human media.

So, thinking about the best measures to combat fascism, a movement that gains great visibility in digital media, mainly due to the enormous reach and the proportions that any act performed on Web 2.0 can take, it is possible to imagine some forms of containment that would be effective, such as, for example, the responsibility of the digital platform providers, according to the scope of each tool that each one can turn to act, or play any role of responsibility for any content that is shared through its software, or by the systems of records, as well as use of fake accounts. However, it must be taken into account that these measures taken in more energetic ways can enter into a conflict, in a strong disagreement with all the current rules and norms of freedom on the internet, and the case of ending up undermining your own liberal principles may occur.

4. CONCLUSION

Technology has shortened the spaces and divisions between people, allowing, through social media tools (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) an approach and possibility of online dialogue in interpersonal relationships. In fact, these social media have a strong potential for promoting democratic practices. In fact, crypto-democracy is already a reality, even if it is not used so often. However, some concerns arise, because just as the spaces for discussion become broader, more practical and easier to reach the population, there is a discussion about dangerous points, such as populism and digital fascism.

Populist speeches have always been based on different ideologies, both on the left and on the right. Right-wing populism, in turn, follows an extremely exclusive and prejudiced ideological current, based on xenophobic ideals, against immigrants, against minorities that do not follow a certain stipulated social standard. Furthermore, it still seeks to mischaracterize traditional media, assuming that it is unreliable and should not be taken into account. While left-wing populism continues to oppose certain privileges stipulated as immoral, it is usually a position taken by a particular financial elite.

This spread of populist content has gained a lot of momentum on social media, especially right-wing populism. Now, when analyzing its characteristics, presented in this article, it is noticeable that it is ingrained within society. An example of this are the Brazilian elections of 2018, where debates on social networks arose with an extreme amount of false news, accusations of a “fear” of a seizure of power by a “communist threat”, and that readjustment of social network profiles with the photos using the green-yellow shirt together with political themes used in the photo, or the exchange of Twitter names with symbols of flags or little hands symbolizing “little firearms with hands”.

Furthermore, it was not only populism that gained extreme strength with this transformation of Web 1.0 (which citizens did not have so much power to produce content) into Web 2.0. Fascism, which has haunted the history of mankind, with its

authoritarian and totalitarian practices, has gained significant space on the Internet, which becomes another major concern. The fascist idea that basically consists of a promise in the emergence of a supposed savior who takes a country in “trouble”, in “decadence” and with all its “charisma” and transforms it into a strong world power, where the economy grows, families live better, that is, they use a miraculous and saving fallacy.

Originally, through propaganda to demonstrate their “great deeds”, fascists sought, through their propaganda, to reach as many countries as possible to extend their regime and thus acquire greater strength, greater power. However, these ideas were disseminated and passed on by the political leaders themselves. What does not happen with Digital Fascism. The technological environment and — again — social networks, respectively, allowed this discourse to be produced also by citizens. In fact, they were not simply generated by citizens, they also had the capacity to be the driving force behind the proliferation of fascist discourses. Furthermore, there is talk of data protection, where citizens end up taking a very serious risk if fascist governments take over their data and invade the privacy of each individual to penalize them otherwise the imposed system.

It is not difficult to perceive digital fascism in contemporary society, when even in Brazil there are cases of people calling for the return of the military regime, with a nationalist and authoritarian bias that has brought countless forms of disrespect for human rights, or other authoritarian similar practices. It can be easily seen on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.

From this, it is clear that the new technologies, while presenting great potential for the promotion of democracy, bring with them a great risk to the democratic state. We must think of solutions to this problem that do not limit people's freedom of expression, privacy and intimacy on the internet, but also that human rights and democracy, which are the central bases of a society, are not at risk. fairer with respect for plurality. Populist discourse and fascism must be contained, as generally these, as

previously demonstrated in this study, have a main source in young people with low education, or even in people with a lack of information, for which a lot has happened through misinformation. It is necessary, then, to think about education, or re-education, not only personal, but also digital and more humanized.

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