

Para-fascist rhetorics and their counter-images: a critical cartography

Lior Zisman Zalis

Center for Social Studies, University of Coimbra / liorzalis@ces.uc.pt

Diego Posada

University of Barcelona / diegopg6@gmail.com

Translated by George Hutton



From the moment we began putting together the open call for papers, to the writing of this editorial, the issues that compelled us to launch this particular edition have become further exacerbated. The authoritarian and violent discourses and politics of austerity and cuts have intensified at a great rate. In Latin America, and elsewhere in the world, there have been uprisings against the kind of anti-grass-roots economic reforms dictated by international banks and funds. Governments, in response, have besieged countries, they have imposed curfews, they have ordered mass arrests, they have 'disappeared' protestors, they have shot at them, killed them, and they have (literally) declared war on their own people: a massive deployment of state-sponsored violence that shows how the neoliberal dismantling has not dismantled States, but rather the commons.

The events of this year directly relate to the questions we were mulling over when we sent out the open call for papers: can the current rise of the far-right, around the world, be understood as a spreading of the most extreme and deadly effects of neoliberalism, which are nothing new for those territories and peoples who have been historically colonised? How can we double down the fight against the current state of capitalism? How do we rewrite the political vocabulary of acts of dissent against capitalism, racism and the cisheteropatriarchy? What concepts, images and practices are

useful to us – in the situated sense – in order to dispute the construction of shared imaginaries when faced with the current political emergency? Within the limitations of academia, what practices, ways of sharing and of producing different knowledge, struggles and experiences do we deem possible when faced with the urgency to take action? What stance do we take as researchers? Taking a position from the universities by those who dispute these spaces serves precisely as a field of criticism to rethink the role of academic production, beyond its self-referentiality, in the face of the problems of everyday life.

In the only debate during the last electoral campaign in Spain an example came up of the link between the discourses of social democratic neoliberalism and the far-right across Europe: the candidate and Socialist president, Pedro Sánchez, in response to Vox, said that his policies to combat illegal immigration were highly effective, but that, unlike the far-right party, they were carried out with a humanist discourse. Racist policies, along with rising poverty, are the perfect conditions for the strengthening of the fascistic right, the articulation of which involves defending and promising to ramp up what are essentially the policies of death as already exerted by neoliberalism. It is worth noting that humanist discourses have been used to justify the most devastating exterminations in history, indicating who is and who is not human: from the witch hunts to European colonialism, the Nazi mass exterminations, up to the current genocide of the Palestine people – they have all been carried out under humanist discourses.

As the editors of this issue, we want to pay particular attention to Abya Yala. Because we come from its contexts, our bodies (and our documents) are marked by its history, and our ways of thinking and feeling are situated from there. Although colonialism has indeed been an uninterrupted constant, today we are witnessing a reconquest, a glorification of white supremacy – disguised within a supposed ubiquity of racial intermixing – as well as the increasingly rapid extermination of the indigenous people who have resisted these five long centuries. The current political moment is a war against those who have taken a stand to try and bring an end to neoliberal plundering. This war has been clear in recent events: in the raging fires, the illegal extraction of wood and makeshift mines in the Amazon, instigated by landowners and legitimised by Bolsonaro's racist discourses which identify indigenous people as a burden on the country's productivity; in the escalating genocide of the indigenous peoples and other social leaders who defend their territories from the multinationals in Colombia, with its epicentre in Cauca; in the rise of neo-Pentecostal churches which, alongside the Catholic church, have disseminated discourses of what they call *gender ideology*, a discursive weapon for the reconquest of the bodies of women and/or people of non-conforming sexual

identities; in the disproportionate military repression of protests in Ecuador, Haiti, Chile, and the militarisation of cities and the raiding of social organisations before the national strike on 21st November in Colombia; in the recent coup in Bolivia, which was not against a government, but rather, as the coup's participants themselves have said, it was an attempt to return Christ to his rightful place and thus remove, forever, Pachamama from the governmental Palacio Quemado, i.e. a coup of evangelising whiteness against the country's indigenous peoples, supported by the United States and the European Union, who in turn are interested in the extensive lithium reserves found in that country. It is, ultimately, a continental coup to further strengthen a war of reconquest against the movements of decolonisation. Abya Yala is amidst a revolution, and the current widespread state of siege is just proof of the state of emergency in which we have always lived. In our territories, and in our bodies, neoliberalism has been, since its earliest experiments, necroliberalism. Essentially, a government of death and colonial extractivism.



We were confronted by the news of these struggles whilst putting together this body of texts¹. In the year 2019, all over the planet, many different uprisings seek to change those structures that maintain *necroliberal* oppressive power. They propose other forms of politics, attentive to the coagulation of bodies, the reinvention of weapons and models of insurrection. The ecological crisis, caused by exponential economic growth, which is making the planet imminently uninhabitable for most animal species, renders the future null and void, and so the struggles under discussion here are urged to realise their collective dreams in the here and now. Therefore, using utopia as a weapon for challenging the future is something that needs to be performed in the present. The anticapitalist dispute is underway today, more than ever, disputing time, so that there

can be a future, and so we can have a strong link with the past, with their struggles, their tactics and desires. A connection that eroticises our collectivised bodies, recalling the united bodies of the past, which gives us the strength to fight and allows us to understand this struggle as the continuation of the decolonisation of centuries, which itself is still being disputed. An insurgent *eroticism* which strengthens the collective imagination, to invent a dense present time that allows us a pause to be together and become involved in non-teleological temporalities, which confront neoliberal time, which is a continual present with no past or future and which eliminates any possible dissidents from the planet.

This dispute over time has also been present in the current protests in Colombia. “*A parar para avanzar*” (“Let’s stop, so we can move forwards”), was the slogan chanted from 21st November by vast crowds in own of the longest national mobilisations in the history of the country, which is calling for a rupture with the time of capitalism and the west in general, apparent from the very size of the strike. Pausing, slowing down our rhythms, is produced as a form of resistance against the kind of progress that includes fear, massacres and murders, on an everyday basis. To go backwards, to stop growing, to refuse to advance, are proposed as the way forward, the way for life to go on. “We don’t want to go back to normality” shouted the people in the streets of Bogotá, where university classes are now being held in the open, for all, and people are walking without fear. It is a taking back of the streets which had long been snatched away from the people, but it is also an attack on the time that didn’t belong to them either: “long live the national strike”.

It is no coincidence that this kind of performative rehearsal for utopia is happening within the Andes mountain range. In the worldviews of the indigenous Andean people, time is not lineal. In the protests in Ecuador against the *paquetazo*, i.e. the combination of economic measures decreed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and attacked by the president Lenin Moreno, there were rehearsals for what utopia might be like, that were fundamentally anticolonial and counter-neoliberal. In this uprising, amid violent repression by the military, young medical students volunteered to attend to the wounded protestors in the streets of Quito, the universities became a *refuge* where the indigenous people who had come from elsewhere in the country could stay the night, the roads were occupied to set up tables for community meals. (Furthermore – as in Chile – stray dogs took part in the protests, and they were treated and looked after like companions-in-arms, thus producing a logic that goes against humanist speciesism). These protests were against the measures that would intensify neoliberalism, an ideology which demands – among other assaults on decent living standards – cuts in public health, the privatisation and elitist management of education (which particularly excludes indigenous and black

people), as well as the imposing of economisation and the ultra-individualisation of life. The protests were therefore rehearsals for a mode of living that does not conform to neoliberal reason, i.e. there was access to healthcare, universities and a life in common. Rehearsals for a well-adjusted life, carried out historically by indigenous communities in resistance to colonialism. *iHasta que valga la pena vivir!* ("Until life is worth living!"), as they have been shouting in Chile, and as we all shout together: it is now, it is the past and the future².

Having been given this opportunity, we were faced with the need to use this space to call for the construction of a series of tools that have the potential to guide practices, poetics and politics. Therefore, this edition was an appeal to equip ourselves with non-conforming imaginaries and vocabularies, based on concrete experiences, in order to foster new ways of thinking in terms of both a grammatology and visualities that excite and mobilise bodies, spaces, politics and images. We sought to invent and make an inventory of words and images that might be able to suggest other ways of thinking and carrying out aesthetic-political praxis. We are touched, from our position of feeling/thinking, that this publication coincides with the present struggles in Abya Yala, with which it has great affinity.

Key to this editorial process was Sarah Ahmed's concept of the "survival kit", which we discuss in our interview with Lucía Egaña, in this same issue. This idea appears as a theoretical weapon to help develop distinct images that would orient desires, struggles and performativities in order to respond to the urgency of today's problems. Ahmed's survival kit (2017) contains texts, people, histories, and it works as "a handle at the very moment one seems to lose it, when things seem to fly out of hand; a way of holding on when the possibility you were reaching for seems to be slipping away" (p.240). In this spirit, we sought, in the "Focus" section of *Vocabularies in dispute* to bring together two experiences that develop glossaries and grammatologies that compel us to rise up, that propose concepts which allow us to see struggles, outrage and other ways of living.

The article by Colectivo Ayllu, *15 Basic Concepts so that a White European might consider Reparations*, and the one by Jimena Andrade Forero, *Glossary of terms { . . . for life . . . }*, are toolboxes based on struggles and lived research projects, and they form a theoretical and conceptual body, informing the everyday and organic use of political vocabulary. Other toolboxes also appear throughout this issue, in the form of references and concepts, and then challenging them, or in the references to authors, books and artistic experiences. All of this shows how a space such as this one, a university journal, can become a weapon, a tactic, an instigator of movements.

In this issue of Re-visiones, you will also find texts by guest researchers to collaborate in the debate proposed here. Reflections upon the regimes of visibility and the reproduction of authoritarianism, within the logics of power, can be found in texts such as that by Sayak Valencia, *The Regime is Live(-streamed) and Kicking*, in which she elaborates on how the “governance of emotions” challenges the regimes of representation and positions violence on the level of aesthetics; or the article by Daniel Inclán, *Authoritarian Tendencies of the Society of the Collapse*, a reflection on the need to “construct archives that fight against the originating sense of the contemporary archive”, that is, to understand how the mode of production of memory continues to be a crucial space in the fight against these new authoritarian forms of power. Furthermore, there is the text by Suely Rolnik, *In the beginning was the Affect* (based on work by *Mapa Teatro* in Bogotá), and the article by Bethania Assy, *Insurgent Subjectivities and Political Empowerment: Notes on Brazilian Hip Hop* (based on the phenomenon of hip-hop as a radical poetic-political experience), which are fundamental materials that take the reflection on aesthetic practices and turn it into a space that is conducive to responding to the most vital and urgent contemporary issues. Furthermore, there are two texts by the Brazilian researcher and artist Jota Mombaça, namely *Strategic notes regarding the political usage of the concept of place of speech* and *Lauren Olamina and I at the gates of the end of the world*, which both make a key contribution to reflections on fiction, racialisation, whiteness and place of speech, within the broader context of social movements, artistic institutions and debates inside and outside of academia. The *Conversation with Kristin Ross* reminds us, as we have said before, of the “right now” of readability for revolts such as the Commune and, at the same time, she offers a reading of Zapatismo and the ZADs as distinct ways of fighting for territory.

In the Dossier section we find distinct voices, experiences and reflections on the tension that arises between naming the current political moment and the memory of past authoritarianisms, such as in the texts *From the imperfection avant-garde aesthetic to the "Fascinating Fascism"* by Javier Mateo Hidalgo; *Political Surveillance Photography and Generational Memory in Puerto Rico: Images of a Vanished World?* by Francisco José Fortuño Bernier; *Conspiracy and Meme in the Alt-right: Notes on the Myth of Cultural Marxism* by Miguel Ángel Rego Robles and Alejandro Sánchez Berrocal; and *The Persistence of the Collective: A Comparative Approach to Images of the Trade Union Body in 1963 and 2017 in Argentina* by Federico Bauso Baltrán. In this same section there are also reflections on key conceptual points such as that of *friendship* in the text by Ana Luiza Braga and Catarina Botelho, *The names of friendship. Speculative imagination for other relational horizons*; that of *uchronia* in *We've no place to go. Uchronia against Utopia*, a contribution by Angélica Tognetti y Enric Puig; there are also sound-based interventions in *The loudspeakers also shout* by Alejandro

Brianza and Agustín Guaraz. This issue ends with three reviews: one on the exhibition by the Portuguese artist Grada Kilomba in São Paulo, on structural racism and white narcissism; another on an exhibition in Barcelona by the Mexican artist Issa Tellez, who works on the theme of spirituality in the current spaces of contemporary art; finally, we have a review of the book "Fiestas, memorias y archivos: Política sexual disidente y resistencias cotidianas en España en los años 70" ("Celebrations, Memories and Archives: Dissident Sexual Politics and Everyday Resistance in Spain in the 1970s"), which asks about issues related to policies on sexual dissidence and the ways in which this memory is produced. A whole body of tactics which might offer scope for action.

Today's world leaves us with a sense of anxiety that flits between the hope for change and the gloom of state-sponsored repression. Given that Re-visiones is a journal for critical visualities, we thus leave evidence of the dispute about the gaze, the issue of visibility in times of overexposure. As Georges Didi-Huberman (2014) once said, images should disturb language and demand its reformulation, to make its unnoticed readability appear. We therefore end with examples of tactics based on and about visibility. Regarding this, in the uprising in Chile there has been a profound battle of images and symbols, where brilliant memes have been produced – which, among other things, have allowed us to see the similarity and continuity between democracy and dictatorship –; statues of Pedro de Valdivia and other conquistadors have been pulled down, squares have been renamed and songs have been chanted en masse, by thousands of people. The repressive response by the State, regarding visibility, has included representing protests as acts of vandalism, and systematically blinding protestors. They have turned the permanent lack of vision into the due punishment for taking part in the protests. In response, the popular uprising has used the eye and the loss of vision as a symbol for this repression, turning street furniture into bleeding eyes, producing photographs of the protestors with mutilated eyes, or marches of people wearing eye patches. One of the most visible victories of this dispute was the destruction of one of the police drones, flying overhead and keeping a watchful eye over events, thus turning the streets into panopticons. From multiple different angles, protestors pointed lasers at the drone (i.e. the same laser pointers used in protests around the world to dazzle the police's riot vans and visors). The drone's lack of vision made it come crashing to the ground, causing thunderous celebration in the square.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3PKJYGoUjJo>









Bibliography

AHMED, SARA. (2017). *Living a Feminist Life*. London: Duke University Press.

DIDI-HUBERMAN, GEORGE. (2014). *Pueblos expuestos, pueblos figurantes*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Manantial.

Notes

¹ From Algeria, where they fought to bring down the president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, to the people of Lebanon, fighting against the government, mainly following the introduction of a tax on phone calls in applications such as WhatsApp; Egypt, where there are marches calling for the resignation of the president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi; Iran, where there are mass protests against the rise in the price of benzene, with violent reactions from the authorities of the ayatollah Ali Khameneiy, as well as measures such as the blocking of the Internet in the country; Iraq, where there are protests against corruption and social inequality; Sudan, where they are calling for the removal of the dictator Omar al-Bashir, and where they are undergoing a transition in government; Hong Kong and other Chinese cities are demanding the end of the law of extraditions targeted at political opponents of continental China; and the aforementioned struggles in Abya Yala.

² We are saddened that we do not have the same access to images and texts from Haiti that we have from protests in other countries. This might be due to media apartheid – and not only by the media – that Haiti has always been under. One thing we are certain of is that when the people of Haiti rise up, Latin America rises up.