

Fascism is not an Information problem

Gender and Microfascism

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When U.S. President Joe Biden called MAGA Republicans “like semi-fascism” in late August, then gave a speech in Philadelphia a few days later on a set decked out in martial aesthetics (including actual Marines), he embodied a contemporary troubling paradox.

We are in a curious historical moment in which it is easy to name the enemy as fascist, even while enacting fascist tendencies. Associating Trump with fascism has been in play for years before Biden’s half-hearted accusation. Meanwhile, QAnon Christian white supremacists call Biden a Nazi. And all of them are troubled by antifa. Anarchist antifascists find ourselves caught in the cross-hairs of these other so-called antifascists.

When centrist commentators think about fascism, they get worried about wacky beliefs like QAnon taking over the Republican party and about a polarized population. Their concern is with preserving the unity of the Republic and the political spectrum.

This unity (or what we might call the State’s integrative capacities) is in crisis, as even the Pentagon has noted. Their 2017 Strategic Studies Institute report remarked that U.S. was entering a “post-primacy era” where its hegemony was in decline. Civil unrest is increasingly spurred by “a generalized erosion or dissolution of traditional authority structures.” This, according to the report, is due to the proliferation of false facts as well as “fact-toxic” information which, while grounded in accuracy, can poison “important political discourse” and “trigger viral or contagious insecurity.” The State thus sees its delegitimation, including fascist reactions, as primarily an information problem. The report came on the heels of Barack Obama’s Countering Disinformation and Propaganda Act (added to the Defense Authorization Act of 2017). Biden’s Disinformation Governance Board (which lasted less than a month in Spring 2022) may have disappeared, but the activities combating misinformation as a homeland security matter continue.

Buzzwords like disinformation and misinformation lead to state-oriented solutions (primarily through carceral logics articulated by security and military officials), now extended into deputized public/private alliances (a nexus of Big Tech, eerily mushrooming NGOs, and academic researchers). State centrism’s fixation on mis- and disinformation is not primarily antifascist, but anti-extremist. These concepts are wielded against leftist/anti-authoritarian social media accounts even while January 6 insurrectionists take the spotlight. We would do well to revisit what political researchers call the three-way fight, now updated with these newly developing discourses, techniques and terrains.

And, for all of the journalistic finger-wagging and subsequent mea culpa policy changes, Twitter and Facebook’s efforts at account banning and deplatforming are now anachronistic. These actions belong to a different fascist phase: recruitment. Corporate deplatforming, in fact, has led to a new digital archipelago of smaller sites that keep up right wing morale and intensify their ideological work (Parley, Gab, Rumble, BitChute, Getty).

In the wake of the August FBI raid on Trump’s Mar-A-Lago outpost, right wing media influencer-agitators have heightened their inflammatory rhetoric. The street level attacks by Patriot Front and Proud Boys on drag shows, parades, and library story times form an everyday base of intimidation, while the courts restore heteropatriarchy as

official policy. To put it bluntly, the far right is essentially finished with its recruitment phase and is now gathering strength through strategic mobilization.

We need to stop thinking of fascism as an information crisis. What needs to be understood is the broader context for January 6 and fascist resurgence, one that can be described as a transformation problem. Gab founder Andrew Torba articulates this in his platform's long-term objective: "We can, must, and will lay the foundation of a new civilization, an unapologetically Christian civilization. A parallel Christian economy."

Collapse is itself a transformation spawning other transformations, ones that bind a people (the fasces) in reactionary ways. These revivals are types of what I call microfascism. Before fully formed fascism is possible (as a political party, state form, even social movement), its emergent qualities are patterned in culture.

Political theorist Roger Griffin defines fascism as palingenetic ultra-nationalism, emphasizing fascism's need to renew itself. But if the forms of domination precede the nation, then fascism might encompass something broader. I call this palingenetic eliminationism: a force, principle, or subject that can only renew itself through the reduction of others. Elimination does not just refer to direct extermination (though femicide and genocide are terminal points), but is more akin to a de-animation of potentials, an ongoing decapacitation.

Key to this palingenetic eliminationism is a war of gender restoration, where the fight in imaginary, mythic, literary, even game-like realms result in deadly real-world consequences.

The Christian nationalist version has increased its patriarchal pronouncements in videos, podcasts and news shows, all calling for a resurrection of masculine dominion. It's this brand of misogyny that fueled Robert Coleman's spear-fishing killing of his two small children in 2021 because he believed that his wife was passing on serpent DNA. It also inspired the 2021 Atlanta spa killer (who invoked the archaic religious idea of being tempted by women as his reason for eliminating them). While commentators quickly identify mental illness as a cause, they don't situate it as a socially produced desire to reduce women or as a fascist intensified mutation of subjective structures already in place.

But misogynistic killings don't need explicit religious overtones. Lyndon McLeod closed out 2021 with mass murder in Denver's tattoo artist community. In his novels, videos, and tweets, he explicitly called for more control over women's sexuality, especially by a revival of male honor violence (in particular, when women disrespect men). McLeod declared war against a society that, according to him, effeminizes men. While McLeod was an avowed atheist, his proclamations echoed a theme publicized weeks earlier by U.S. Congressman Paul Gosar, who posted an anime-inspired video in which his avatar kills his House colleague Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. These are mediated fantasies, even simulations, of a Divine order that they wish to impose violently on others.

Patriarchy is an early, even primordial, form of palingenetic eliminationism. Primordial here does not mean natural or eternal, but the site of establishing the "first order." The "ordering" capacity that forms arche as hierarchy might be found here. It is to this arche that anarchists need to attend, in ways that Chiara Bottici's book, *Anarchafeminism*, theorizes.

We are witnessing a revival of the archaic war on women through re-masculinization and an increased control over social and biological reproduction. To be clear, this does not only refer to people who can procreate under the sign of woman. The anti-trans campaigns (even among feminists) reactivate a violence as fundamental ordering principle: the control of desire, sexuality, and metamorphosis. Such order rests on the elimination of potentials (coded as transgressions, refusals, desire); they are not reducible to nationalism (they existed before nations) and might even be the precursor to the State. Through racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and the spread of the State-form around the globe, this ordering violence became dominant.

How do we stop this? We need to reconsider how and where we see fascism (as collective binding, or fasces) emerging. This means centering an often-marginalized analytic like gender, and attending to the diffuse forms of everyday subjectivity and desire upon which more systemic types of fascism are built.

Composing anti-microfascist social bodies includes looking to the cultural sphere: the return of witches, the collective accountability processes that typically get dismissed as cancel culture, and the reparative calls that counter reactionary restoration. To the fascists' necrotic (even necrophilic) cultures, a counteraction through the defense and extension of life-affirming values (as proposed by adrienne maree brown, Veronica Gago, and others).

The surge of college anti-gender violence protests in 2021 expressed a community defense-based abolition of campus structures that have institutionalized patriarchal wars on women such as fraternities. While perhaps not

the first thing we think of as antifascism, these movements show how the cultural production of fascist subjectivity is rooted in an everyday mandate of masculinity which fuels authoritarian orders. In sum, to their attempts at elimination, we counter with abolition.

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