

## **Panic Narratives: hauntings in politics**

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When I was a little girl, I used to spend vacations on an uncle's farm in Minas Gerais. At night the children listened to stories of hauntings and werewolves told by a cowboy. Being a fearless grown man, I didn't doubt his word. Fear invaded me and I lived the parallel reality of a haunted world of fake news.

This memory came to mind because a significant and diverse portion of our people lives in fear of parallel realities conveyed on social media, trumpeted in haunted discursive categories and full of hatred and dangers that are repeated in speeches by religious authorities and political leaders.

Over the last few years, a powerful narrative has been built in Brazil that instils collective fear to its extreme limit. The construction of this type of narrative is strategic and aims to shift the political debate from the democratic field of contradiction to a divided binary model of the world. On the one hand defenders of the homeland, the family, children, Western Christian civilization. On the other hand, those who are classified as dangerous agents of destruction to be annihilated, represented by the political opposition, by leftists, environmentalists, feminist movements, anti-racist movements, LGBTQ+, indigenous peoples, defenders of human rights and democratic institutions, among others. . . These narratives stridently and constantly repeat that temples and churches will be burned, that communism will destroy private property, that boys will become girls because of a so-called gender ideology that we don't know what it is, that weapons protect life, what is more dangerous than the werewolf.

Constant threats and hauntings spread insecurity, panic, disbelief in the institutions of the democratic rule of law, in the electoral system, in the press, in the new legitimately elected and sworn government, seen as incapable of defending the population from this dispersed and frightening evil, or even as guilty of these evils. And they advocate a messianic and authoritarian populism that would offer them security against these dangers.

This successful strategy of introducing haunting fear into the space of political debate is characteristic of the radicalized extreme right and cuts across educational levels and social classes, generating polarization, intolerance, hatred and a collective cognitive dysfunction fed in virtual or real bubbles, as in Bolsonarist camps, and which is directly linked to the deplorable events of January 8<sup>th</sup> in Brazil.

Strategists, financiers, and supporters, by leniency or omission, of the many events of subversion and terrorism that have spread over the last few years, culminating with the attack on the Praça dos 3 Poderes in Brasília, instrumentalize this collective cognitive dissonance as a mass of maneuver for their political objectives. A significant portion of those encamped across the country and those who, as in a reverse mirror, dressed with the colors of the nation

and marched to destroy the foundations of this same nation ,were and continue to be, imbued with this haunting fear that brings a sense of salvationist mission to their destructive fury.

Sowing this type of panic, through fake news, not only threatens democratic institutions, but also threatens the right to mental and physical health and well-being of women, men and children, a good to be protected by the State.

Deconstructing these panic narratives is urgent and necessary. Because the place of a werewolf, a headless mule and a haunting is in fiction and does not fit in the reconstruction of the plural and democratic debate in Brazil.

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