Between Antifascism and Antifa: A Conversation with Mark Bray, Author of *Antifa*

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Entrevista realizada pelo Google Meet, em 13 de setembro de 2021,
por Sergio Schargel* e Julia de Oliveira Góes Guimarães**.

Antifa, by **Mark Bray**, innovated in a field of study with wide coverage: fascism. Bray dared to look at the other and forgotten side: anti-fascism. In his book *Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook*, Bray deals not with anti-fascism as mere opposition to fascism, but with a tradition of political combat that dates back to the beginnings of Mussolini's Fascism. It is noticeable in *Antifa*, and even in the interview that follows, the combination between the two universes of the author. Bray, an academic historian at Dartmouth College, analyzes historical and contemporary fascisms, as well as the evolution of the concept of fascism over the last century and the equally secular struggle of anti-fascists. But this is not just a book of academic or historiographical analysis. The militant side of the author (one of the organizers of Occupy Wall Street) emerges, especially in the dozens of interviews with anti-fascists around the world.

Antifa, de **Mark Bray**, inova num campo com ampla cobertura de estudos: o fascismo. Bray ousou olhar para outro e esquecido lado: o antifascismo. Em *Antifa: o manual antifascista*, Bray trata não do antifascismo como mera oposição ao fascismo, mas também de uma tradição de combate político que remonta aos primórdios do Fascismo de Mussolini. É perceptível em *Antifa*, e na entrevista que segue, a fusão entre os dois universos do autor. Bray, historiador acadêmico do Dartmouth College, analisa os fascismos históricos e contemporâneos, bem como a evolução do conceito de fascismo ao longo do último século e a luta igualmente secular dos antifascistas. Mas este não é um livro apenas de análise acadêmica ou historiográfica. A faceta militante do autor (um dos organizadores do Occupy Wall Street) emerge, principalmente nas dezenas de entrevistas com antifascistas ao redor do mundo.

* Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF), Niterói, RJ, Brasil. sergioschargel_maia@hotmail.com <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5392-693X>
** Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil juliaogguimaraes@gmail.com <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4776-9290>

Mark, first of all we would like to address how thankful we are for this chat. We would like to have a debate, a discussion on some of the topics on your book. We are both scholars in fascism, who have been researching the topic for a while. It was very nice reading your book to finally gaining insight on the side of the coin, as we have been reading a lot on fascism, but nearly nothing on antifascism. Could you talk a little bit about who you are, just to introduce the readers to your career, your story and publications.

Sure! I'm a Historian, my research focuses on political radicalism, human rights, terrorism, politics in general. My regional focus is modern Europe. But I like to do a lot of transnational and global work as well. I'm also a longtime activist. I was involved with the Occupy Wall Street Movement in New York. So, my first work is about Occupy Wall Street with a specific focus on the role of anarchists and anti-authoritarian politics in Occupy Wall Street in New York. I wrote *Antifa: The Anti-fascist Handbook* in 2017 based on interviews with anti-fascists in Europe and North America and historical research on anti-fascist movements in those regions. I have another book coming out next year about anarchist propaganda. So, within the realm of modern Europe my regional focus has been Spain, and to a lesser extent France. And, you know, politically I've been involved in a variety of campaigns and movements over the years from immigrant rights to anti-war and other kinds of work like that. And I see myself as someone who tries to bring scholarship to bear in a useful way for political struggle and, to the degree possible, try to bring those two worlds together. Now I teach at Rutgers University which is the state university of New Jersey. I'm originally from New Jersey. I suppose that's the basic information.

I would like to know what led you to research anti-fascism. Because we've been reading a lot in the past couple of years about fascism in general and more so about democratic backsliding and yours was the first book I actually read on Antifa and not on the event or phenomenon of fascism itself. So, what drove you to it?

The sequence of events that led me to write the book were a little bit random and haphazard. As I mentioned with my background information, I've been involved in a lot of different kinds of political work. I would say the majority of the different radical left forms of activism or struggle. Labor organizing, environmental work and so forth. The only one I have never actually been involved directly with was anti-fascism, because the area I grew up in in New

Jersey didn't have a far-right presence in the punk scene, in the neighborhood, in the communities. So it wasn't something I put time into. But it was something I was aware of through groups like Anti-Racism Action and through traveling around Europe, specifically as a modern Europeanist and seeing anti-fascist around, knowing about their influence in music and football fan culture and so forth. So, it was something I was aware of, sort of like the weather, but it wasn't something I put time into.

While doing my PhD in History, fascism wasn't my area of focus. As scholars we have things that we feel like we develop and things that are adjacent to it and interesting. But, you know, I hadn't read every book on fascism, but I was interested in it. And then when 2016 rolled around and President Trump, well… Donald Trump was elected president, I went to the protest at his inauguration on January 20th, 2017, in Washington D.C. On that day there were a number of marches, one of them that I participated in was the Anti-Capitalist Anti-Fascist block, the kind of black block that broke a number of windows and many people were arrested. It came to be known as the J20 case and nearly 100 people faced charges that could have given them as much as years in jail. The main charge being for conspiracy to commit a riot. But I digress. The point is, I was there that day, I was fortunately not arrested. But I was observing a lot of the interactions that protesters were having with Trump supporters in the streets of Washington D.C. Because, as you may know, D.C. is a Democrat city, and most of the people that came to support Trump that day were from out of town. And I just started to think about the importance of the social fabric, of the kinds of values we consider to be acceptable and the kinds we consider to be unacceptable as a society. How Trump and Trumpism weas, among other things, an attempt to roll back progress that movements for social justice have made over the years towards establishing certain kinds of taboos against overt racism, overt misogyny and so forth. So I wrote a little article which was called something "Trump and everyday fascism" or something like that. And then shortly thereafter there was a protest against Milo Yiannopoulos at UC Berkeley, which included property destruction of windows. That, along with the punching of Richard Spencer, made the question of Antifa into a national news topic.

A national public radio show was looking for someone to speak about it, and because of the article that I wrote and because I knew someone who was an intern there from Occupy Wall Street, they said "hey Mark, why don't you come and talk about it?". So I came on to talk about Antifa, its politics, its history, without having done any specific research into it. I was just someone

who was moderately knowledgeable. A publisher heard the interview on the radio and wrote me an email saying "hey, do you think you can turn that interview into a book?". And so I, perhaps a little foolheartedly, said "sure!". So in the course of 3 months, I did all of the outlining, researching, interviewing, writing, editing, etc. between, I suppose, the very end of February and May, 2017. They wanted to publish it quickly, so it would be a timely newsworthy topic. They rushed it a bit because of Charlottesville, so it was published a week after the Charlottesville incident of 2017. In a certain sense, as scholars we are trained to spend many years developing expertise and many years working on a project so that we get everything exactly right. And that is very important scholarship. But what I did was something a little different. I took a bit of a leap, took some risks and wrote something very quickly on something that, in some sense, I had a lot of background in because of my knowledge of radical left politics and history, but in another sense did not have much of a background on. But because, as you point out, there was really very little written about post-war anti-fascism, it was sort of a wide-open field for me to draw on. So that was sort of what happened.

Your book contains a lot of interviews, how was this process? You said it yourself that anti-fascist militants are sometimes unreceptive to interviews. How did you manage to talk to them?

I reached out first to people that I knew personally, that had been part of groups and campaigns, and asked people that I knew who were in the scene, so to speak, to give me any contacts that they thought would be willing to talk. It was helpful that I had traveled around Europe a lot, particularly doing presentations on my Occupy Wall Street book back in 2014 and 2015. So, a lot of people in countries like Norway, Denmark and Greece had met me in person. And that makes a big difference. Instead of being just a name in an e-mail, you have met someone, you've had a meal with them, you have friends in common. So that helped me get a lot of interviews. But there were still a lot of people who didn't respond to my inquiries or who declined. And that's fine and perfectly understandable. The irony of that whole thing is that after the book came out a lot of people, including some people who had declined the initial interview, were getting in touch and telling me all their stories. And I said, "well, that's wonderful, I'm happy to know, but in a certain sense it's too late. I could have used this six months ago, a year ago". But I don't blame anyone because If I were in that position, I might not have responded either. But basically, it is because I have met people, because I had connections, because I

was part of some of the same radical unions or organizations. It was my political credentials that gained me access, not my academic ones. Perhaps, arguably, the academic ones were, in certain circumstances, counterproductive.

Some leftists are wary of academics who want to swoop in on a topic, you know, extract information and publish something to make their careers, and then move on without having any stakes in the actual struggle, right? That's an issue. So, because of my political commitments people were confident enough that wasn't going to be my sole purpose.

And after you published the book, how did that impact both your credentials?

Someone asked me once what was my day-to-day motivation and I said it was pure fear. And I mean that literally fear that I was going to get retaliation from right wingers and get threats, which I eventually did, though fewer than I expected. Fear that the people I interviewed would think that I would misrepresent what they were about, fear that the leftists would think this is a piece of junk, fear that Historians would think that I'm a hack or something.

Fortunately, for the most part, my fears didn't come to pass. Sure I had some right-wing threats, but they didn't get as egregious as I was concerned it would be. Sure, some Scholars don't like it, but they tend to be right-wing Scholars. And so, you know, I don't care what they think. In general, the left is really supportive. So, in that sense, I wasn't too displeased for the outcome as far as academic career goes. I was an adjunct when I wrote it. I'm still an adjunct now. It's possible that some search committees who were considering me for jobs may not have liked it. But it's also possible that I got farther in some searches because of it, because some people did like it. The job situation is very difficult with academic jobs, you can never really assume that failure is because of any particular reason, it's hard to really know for sure. Certainly, I became much more well-known because of it. But as far as my material life, it hasn't changed much. And as I said, I think most leftists approved the project at the very least because there wasn't much else like that on the subject. Subsequently, a bit more has been published over recent years, which is nice to see.

Anything you would recommend to fans of your book?

You mean other books to check out? Well, there's another book by a sociologist who was part of the anti-fascist movement himself years ago called *American Antifa*. That was published a couple of years ago. It is very good. Shane Burley's *Fascism Today* is also a good book. Natasha Leonard wrote an

interesting book about the topic; it's called *Being Numerous: Essays on Non-Fascist Life*. There's a neat book that hasn't come out yet, but I just wrote an endorsement for it, it's called *On Microfascism* and it's thinking about the kind of foundations of fascism in patriarchy and Western traditions of individualism and misogyny. Those are few things that come to mind.

Thanks for the suggestions. Now entering more in the book itself. In a passage in your book, you say that "the more successful, the less its importance is recognized" and you give several historical examples that support this statement, but would you remember a few to say now? And what methods can anti-fascism use to gain this recognition?

The point that I was making with that statement is the argument that the goal of anti-fascism, and here we're focusing on post-war anti-fascism (although I think to some extent it applies to pre-war and intra-war fascism as well), is to stop the growth of fascists and far-right politics before it can take even the first step towards establishing itself in communities, societies, workplaces and cultural spaces and so forth.

And so, if you accomplish that goal of giving it no space to breathe and no space to grow, that means that you stop it before it's considered significant by society. Because you're stopping something that's considered insignificant. I mentioned that because it's a bit of a way of explaining how the anti-racist action movements of the 80s and 90s and 2000s of the United States have largely been ignored outside of radical left circles, and even to some extent ignored in radical left circles. I think in part because they were struggling against forces that were often not considered serious enough to care whether they were stopped.

That's basically what I mean by that statement, and that's why I say that some of the greatest successes of anti-fascist movements exist in a kind of hypothetical limbo where you would have to actually ascertain the importance of their achievement. You would have to compare it to a kind of counterfactual of what would have happened if no one had organized against this group, but you can't actually directly access.

You mentioned right at the beginning of your book, and you also said it right at the beginning of this interview, that because of time constraints and of the urgency of publishing the book right after Trump was elected, you would focus your research on the US, Canada and Western Europe. I was wondering if since then you had any chance to dive deeper into fascism in the global South

and if you believe there's any difference in the way fascism and antifa develop in the global periphery and in in the global North.

I have done a bit more reading on the global South. I mean, I had some basic knowledge previously, but I felt like I needed to carve out a manageable space regionally without overextending myself too much. So I stuck with. You know, I'm a Europeanist. I know fair amount about Europe, and I live in the United States. I co-edited an issue of the *Radical History Review* on Fascism and anti-fascism since 1945, which has some good articles about different parts of the world outside of the global North (you might want to check out some, it's got some good stuff in there).

One of the things that interests me about that conversation, particularly in parts of Asia and Africa that have experienced anti-imperial movements over the last hundred years, is how the conversation around fascism and anti-fascism overlaps with questions around imperialism and anti-imperialism. And the question of what is the relationship between fascism and imperialism, To what extent can we think of fascism as a kind of imperialism? How have anti-fascist movements been inspired by anti-imperial movements and vice-versa. You know, that's kind of an interesting overlap. One of the questions I get sometimes when talking about antifa is about whether the term antifa applies to anti-fascism writing in its entirety. Some people use it that way. I use it as a more of a specific term to refer to one tradition within anti-fascism, which draws its kind of post-war tactics, aesthetics, strategy and outlook from a largely European context. In that sense, there are groups in Brazil, in Colombia, in Japan, etc., that have fashioned themselves on that kind of model. But there are even more groups, some of which call themselves anti-fascists, some of which don't, which are doing similar kinds of work against similar kinds of opponents without drawing from that specifically European tradition.

Certainly, I think that being cognizant of those kinds of overlaps, confusions and convergences is essential, particularly in those regions.

And how do you see Bolsonaro?

Well, you two are far more well-versed on him than I am, for a variety of reasons which are obvious. I'm gonna answer your question with answering a slightly different but related question, which you didn't ask me, but I think it bears upon the question you're asking. Which is, how do we see modern right-wing leaders who clearly have traits that are in line with what Mussolini was

all about, but by virtue of existing and in different national contexts, a hundred years later, have some differences, and how do we flesh that out?

As I said in the beginning, I don't come to this work as a specialist in fascism and far-right politics. My goal is not primarily to stake my claim to what exactly I think fascism is, or exactly what the relationship is between fascism and populism, but nevertheless it comes up and I have my opinions about it. And so, for me part of the game is reconciling two contrasting considerations. One, there is the fact that if we talk about fascism, we need to mean something. We can't mean nothing. We need to mean something and so that's the question of definition. And, of course, you two are well versed in all the challenges of that. Particularly because the original fascists didn't have the same kind of interest in being rationally consistent that other forms of politics have. They disdained that outlook.

And then, on the other hand, the question of definition and precision. You have the issue of over the last hundred years right-wing politics have gone in all sorts of directions in all sorts of contexts. Now the task, of course, when we're looking at Bolsonaro or at Trump, if we are looking at any of these kinds of figures these days, is how do we taken to account change, but oriented in relation to a very dangerous political tradition that continues to exist explicitly and implicitly.

The way that I would often talk about it to journalists would be with an effort to both speak to Historians and specialists who are very precise in how they use the language (sometimes so absurdly precise, in my opinion, as to say that Mussolini was the only fascist movement). But also speak to a popular audience that is less interested in those conversations. And so I've sometimes in the past talked about what I've called spectrums of fascistic politics as a way of saying that we could come up with any kind of definition of fascism that we want and we would find movements, groups, individuals who would check nine out of the ten boxes. And so what would we say about them? Well, to me I think that we can't say "Oh, they didn't check all ten boxes, so they're not fascist, end of conversation". But on the other hand, I don't think we can let our definitions slide to such an extent that a distant resemblance is the same thing as the "real deal". I have talked about spectrums of the fascistic. I have talked about Trump as someone who checks the vast majority of the boxes. Same goes for Bolsonaro. Clearly Bolsonaro is interested in promoting a kind of populist nationalist misogynist return to an imagined past state of racial purity through authoritarian violence. And if that doesn't sound fascistic then I don't know what does.

Sure, I think that we can think of these figures as 21st century fascists while recognizing that there are things that they may say or do that are a little different. Also recognizing that even though we still have examples such as Golden Dawn in Greece, which is more of a kind of fascist textbook example, we also have Vox in Spain or Rassemblement National in France, which have right-wing populist agendas that are clearly historically informed by elements of fascism. Even if their immediate goal is not necessarily a kind of fascist Insurgency. It's part of that same lineage. That's sort of how I talk about it. I feel like there's a game that some of these right-wing trolls play that if you stick to yourself, this is what fascism is, they'll say "oh look, but then there's this thing adjacent to it". I tried it to talk in a way that I hope is somewhat nuanced, capturing all of these paradoxes and complexities without wavering on the fact that this stuff is a living tradition that is still dangerous. That's my best effort as someone who's not actually a scholar of fascism.

Thinking about what explains the support from minorities to Bolsonaro and using the Jewish Community as an example. So, even though Jewish communities are not directly on the target, it still has antisemitic nuances, words, that sometimes appear in his and his followers' discourses. So, what explains, in the case of Brazil, 60% of the Jewish Community supporting Bolsonaro in 2018. I want to understand that. I think it's very shocking, both as a scholar and as a Jewish. I want to understand that because it's still shocking to me.

I'm Jewish too. I don't know enough about Jews in Brazil to say…

But I mean on the broad sense. Why do some minorities support policies and politics that seem to go against them?

At least in the US, part of the issue is Zionism and supporting a figure they consider to be a strong support of Israel. Some Jews will overlook just about any other issue in that direction. I mean, it's surprising to some white Americans that there would be right wing immigrants from Latin America. And the notion that people who were immigrants themselves, or so forth, would then be against immigrants happens with so many ways of immigrants. They arrive, they consider that they are the real national community and anyone who's not coming "in the proper way" is an enemy to the national community.

But you know, beyond that, the like of non-white Nazis is a kind of a head scratcher. I'm not someone who's done extensive research into these kinds of particular cases, but I think in general most people don't do politics based on

all of the issues. Meaning for a lot of people they'll support a party, an individual or an idea based on one or two reasons and not care or overlook the rest. That's a kind of a simplistic explanation, but I think it does show how sometimes we would assume that people would have an interest in one direction, and they end up going in another.

Also, you know, a lot of people are not well versed in history or have a strange interpretation of it. People from colonized countries who support the historical rendition provided by the colonization, that kind of stuff happens. It's strange, but there are all sorts of roots depending on the context in different forms of authoritarianism. Perhaps Zionism in certain cases, patriarchy, homophobia, it depends on the context. There are all sorts of stuff going on. I don't have a great answer for that. But I'm confident that you will come up with the answer.

I follow the same direction you do. I think it's something secondary for them. Perhaps for these people the economics and the politics comes first, and the identities perhaps comes in second or third place. It's still just a hypothesis, it's a question that requires a lot of study, but I wanted to hear from you.

And you get it all the time when you hear right-wing groups in the US. They say "oh, you call them a fascist, but look they have a black guy that's part of their group, or a Jewish guy". And first of all, there were plenty of Jewish fascists in Italy. So, you know, this American notion that Jews can't be fascist is not historically accurate.

In* Antifa *you highlight how throughout History fascism has gained power legally; you also quote one of your interviewees (Jim) saying that "We can't just hope to defeat a far-right electoral project in the way we would defeat a fascist street movement. Instead, we need to be better at our politics than they are at theirs". How, if at all, do you believe that last year's US elections results (and its aftermath with the invasion of the Capitol) has reshaped the fascist threat and Antifa organizing in the country? What can Brazilians learn from the recent US experience moving into our own election year?

I think that it's important to look at how Trump lost. He did not go gracefully, as you are probably aware. He still holds on to the notion that he really won, that the election was stolen from him. And when you throw into the consideration the whole QAnon phenomena, this conspiratorial thinking that there is a small cabal of Jewish Hollywood liberal elite people that have suc-

ceeded in stealing the country away from their "true representative" Donald Trump. This is a stabbed in the back myth that is dangerous. There's been a shift in the center of gravity of right-wing politics in the US over the past years, from the Bush era to today. The influence of the center right has declined significantly and the faith that the average Republican has in the electoral process and in the government has faded. And you can see this in discrepancies around vaccinations, around QAnon, around faith in the outcomes of elections, and in perspectives on the January 6th insurrection. When you have a lot of Republicans that believe it was a good thing and you have even more who think and it's been overstated, it's been overblown by the left to score political points, that it was just kind of a bunch of angry people protesting.

I think that this is a kind of acceleration of tendencies that probably, in some form or another, were going to develop in response to demographic shifts where the white population of the United States won't be a majority for the first time. Where the traditional conservative America that right wingers hold too desperately is disappearing, as you see queer and trans politics advancing, black lives matter, these discussions around pronouns, the use of bathrooms, all these culture war changes.

What I'm saying is that there's more and more angry white people who think their country has been stolen in a literal sense, who have a lot of guns and who are looking to, if necessary by force, "take back their country". Trump may be done. He's probably gonna try to run again for president in 2024. I'm skeptical that he would win, but Trumpism will continue, nonetheless. And even if he doesn't run, a number of the candidates will be Trumpists. Like (Ron) DeSantis, the governor of Florida, who is apparently starting to position himself for a run in 2024 and is kind of anti-vaccine Trump kind of figure. In a sense, the Biden victory does show that the electoral base for a kind of white nationalist politics is shrinking. But if it could manage to reinvent itself in a more charismatic way that comes across as a bit more inclusive, then I think that we could see someone who's maybe a little bit more politically sophisticated than Trump bring about a kind of revised renewed sleeker seemingly more inclusive version of Trumpism in the future. Because Trumpism isn't going away, it has this kind of base and resentment, but in order to succeed it would have to branch out beyond its demographics, which are receding.

Then there's the threat of small groups using arms, the kind cell-based fascist organizing. So, if there's a lot for anti-fascists to grapple with here, even though the struggle is largely out of the headlines, I think both as a kind of small group threat, and as a kind of looming issue in national politics is going

to continue, if under different kinds of circumstances. As far as how this bears upon Brazil, it's hard to just sort of say in a blanket sense. I did a few presentations in Brazil back over the summer of 2019 and I got that question a lot. You know, what should we do here? And, I mean, I don't know. If I had an easy answer, it would probably be something that you would have already come up with yourselves, but I think that limiting my comments to sort of what I was saying about the US. Sure, it's good to get rid of Bolsonaro and Bolsonaro is a problem. But the fact that he's been so successful shows that he's tapping into something that's bigger than him and that will continue even with him gone. Another part of the conversation has to be about how the kind of neoliberalism of Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party, and, from the little I've heard, the Workers Party in Brazil, may have created a space for the right to claim populism. Claim the support of the people when it's perceived that the "left-wing party" is doing more to appeal to international finance than to people's immediate needs. That's part of the issue with outdoing them politically, making it so that they don't have inroads in legitimate grievances.

A very interesting point you raise is about freedom of expression and the limits it must have, contrary to the absolute goal of freedom by libertarians. I would like you to talk a little bit about this myth of freedom of expression as an absolute good, under which absolutely anything can be said, and how to contain it. This has been exactly the rhetoric used by Bolsonaro and his minions in Brazil, reaching the point where the president issued a measure limiting the independence of social media platforms, under the discourse that Twitter, Facebook, etc., would be limiting freedom of expression when removing content. How can freedom, in excess, threaten itself? How to fight this rhetoric? In this scenario, and in the constant attacks that anti-fascists receive not only from fascists, but even from the media and other sectors, what should be their role?

There's obviously a lot to be said and this topic occupies an entire chapter in my book. It's an issue that clearly matters much more in some countries than others. And as I mentioned in some of my talks, I had a friend of mine from Austria who read an early draft of the book to give me feedback. And he pointed: why do you have a whole chapter on freedom of speech, that is not really an issue that is relevant to the conversation, right? Because, you know, in countries like Germany or Austria, there are laws against hate speech and, at least up until recently, it was relatively non-controversial. But in countries like the US, and increasingly in other countries, it's maybe the most important

issue along with violence. Anyone who takes a sophisticated understanding of rights and freedoms knows that there are always examples where any given right will clash with another, right? It's, you know, Political Theory 101. So, the question is: how do we, in a society that wants to synthesize these rights, figure out a way to limit one in the interest of the other? How do we deal with that? Because the notion that any given right can just sort of go off on its own without curtailing another right is farcical.

Connected to that is the issue that actually in the United States there are already plenty of limits on freedom of speech. Around pornography or copyright, for example. There are entire sections of law schools devoted to people learning how to deal with all the limits on freedom of speech. So, the notion that a hand full of scrappy anti-fascists is the cause of the downfall of these holy rights is ridiculous as well.

But for me the most central point is we can't talk about values or rights as if they don't always necessarily pertain to what our political orientations are and what political projects we are summoning them to accomplish. Because a lot of centrists commentators like to imagine that we can talk about these things in the abstract, but all of us mean something specific connected to other values that we uphold. When a liberal says "sure, it's good to resist fascism, but we need to allow them all of the liberties and freedoms to articulate themselves in the public square, online, in classrooms, etc.", it shows that they're not actually committed to rooting out fascism. Because we can see historically that it is by gaining access to these platforms and normalizing their politics, becoming family friendly, claiming the mantle of tradition and identity, that they advance.

I often use examples around universities because I work at a university, because a lot of people that come to my events are students or teachers. If you value equality, anti-racism, diversity, all the things that most universities in the US will claim to value, and at the same time you allow a small student group to plaster the campus with white lives matter posters and to call Black Lives Matter organizers terrorists, to say that gay people are going to hell and that trans people are monsters, are you actually really promoting those values? I don't think that you are.

Because that's a clear instance where the freedom of speech of those hateful people impedes upon the security the sense of human dignity of the other people. And actually, it also impedes upon their freedom of speech because if you feel scared, you're not actually fully free to express yourself. So, I would argue that actually is in the interest of maximizing freedom of speech to limit

the ability of people to impede on the speech of others. Now, you can make that argument from both ways, right. You could argue "it's in the interest of the majority to limit the ability of anti-fascists to impede speech," or you could argue "it's in the interest of the majority to impede fascists the right to free speech." How do you adjudicate that? Well, you're honest about your politics, right? I would argue the one because I think fascism is destructive and immoral. I think it all comes back to what are your politics, how you would judicate it based on those politics without having the liberal fantasy that doesn't enter into the equation.

Ultimately there is the question that some people ask: is shutting down fascists a limitation of their freedom of speech? I would say, yes, it is, but it's okay and it's justified in the context of the anti-fascist struggle. Some people would say it's not. For me, that's kind of a difficult song and dance to pull off that to me doesn't ring true. I think we can say yes, it's a limit up to their rights. But as we started out with any management of rights is going to result at certain times in the promotion of one right over another, and we can adjudicate those by referring to our political values.

And the other thing to throw in is that Bolsonaro, Trump and a lot of the American right-wingers are presenting themselves as the victims of the tech elite. Which is another way to tie into that notion of an elite cabal who's running what we can and cannot manage. It's also worth bearing in mind that when you get into these kinds of issues you also get these tech companies shutting down anti-fascist radical speech and pages as well. Which goes to show you can't really count on corporations to resist fascism or to be the kind of vehicle of anti-fascist resistance.

You talked a lot about the clashing your freedom in your last answer. And freedom has been one of the central issues of this pandemic. The freedom of walking the street while there's a lockdown, or the freedom of not getting vaccinated even though millions of people are dying. From what we've learned in the past year and a half, how do you believe that the pandemic and the long-lasting implications of covid-19 will impact the way we deal with far-right politics and how we combat them? Because the antivax movement is an addition that has been hijacked by the far-right.

They can have it. It's provided an opportunity for right wingers to promote what they're doing. We saw that initially in the US with protests against lockdowns, where you got a lot of The Proud Boys and other kinds of fascists showing up in these anti-lockdown spaces. That should make us attune to the ways

in which fascists tried to wiggle into things. I don't think it's a winning long-term strategy to pursue when that results in a lot of your followers dying, but how to deal with it? I guess the first question is how will it impact the landscape?

Part of the right-wing talking point is that immigrants are bringing covid. Which if you look at the rates in the United States is the most laughable suggestions the notion that there's another place that's worse and they're bringing it to the US. It's also the kind of xenophobic stuff around they calling it the Chinese virus. It will be another way that right wingers will try to appeal to this kind of closed borders, you know, create our own fortress. Not surprisingly, they're trying to paint it as the opposite. They use all these examples of the Holocaust, and say "oh well, you know the Nazis put the stars on people, and so for us being unvaccinated is the same", which is absolutely ridiculous.

A lot of times when you look at right-wing rhetoric you can see that when they make a big effort to portray themselves as something, it kind of shows the implicitness of what they're actually really doing. And certainly, I think that the long-term payoff for them would be presenting themselves as aggrieved by the state as being the victims of this kind of pharmaceutical tech elite.

During the protests that took place in Brazil in 2013, several self-styled anti-fascist collectives emerged within professional categories. Such a movement has expanded into categories such as delivery apps workers…

Are you gonna ask the police question?

Yes.

Okay, go ahead.

In Brazil, the "Anti-Fascism Police Movement" has representatives from various forces in almost every state. One of the biggest criticisms that the movement faces is precisely the apparent contradiction between security forces intrinsically linked to the exercise of coercive power in a capitalist state claiming themselves as anti-fascists. The movement, however, claims that its fight is for the recognition of police officers as workers and even claims that as such they seek to exercise hegemony in the Gramscian molds. I would like to know your position on the subject.

Well, first of all, it's kind of surprising from an American perspective to see such a political take by police officers. In the US, government workers in

general just don't portray themselves as being so validly political, unless it's sort of in a right-wing direction. That's kind of strange because also like, theoretically if you take the position that police officers take, their job is to uphold the law. And so presumably their job is to stop fascist when they do something illegal as it is to stop anyone when they do something illegal, and anyone who doesn't do something illegal shouldn't be stopped. And so this notion of anti-fascist police officer to me is like sort of blurring the question of what is a police officer and what's their job.

There was a little bit of a controversy. Are you familiar with the whole thing that happened on Twitter? About a year and a half ago on Twitter, one of the main "Antifa Police" guy posted a picture holding my book, because my publisher sent him the book and I believe that my publisher is supportive of this movement. I was, prior to that tweet, largely unaware of the movement, didn't know who this guy was, but someone I knew in Brazil said, "check this out". So I tweeted something to the effect of "no, if you're really an anti-fascist quit your job". That's my short answer, but I'll explain it more.

First, I come from the kind of socialist position that the historical role of police is to stop the working-class movement, and that while police work they shouldn't be considered workers in a normative sense, because their job is to uphold the capitalist state. In the United States, and also in Brazil, this means to uphold a kind of white supremacist society. But beyond that larger critique of police is the fact that the specific tradition of antifa that I talk about in my book – and again, the guy was wearing a shirt with the red and black flags of antifa, and said antifa police is a tradition – can be distinguished from other traditions of anti-fascism in large part because it rejects turning to the police, the state and the courts to stop the far-right threat, and argues for a kind of direct action anti-capitalist movement from below.

While you could have a police officer who opposes fascism just as you could have a conservative who opposes fascism, the notion of a specifically antifa police officer is a contradiction in terms. Because antifa is a movement that rejects the notion that the police have a meaningful role to play in the anti-fascist struggle and usually makes the larger argument that police are frequently allies of fascists explicitly or structurally uphold a kind of capitalist parliamentary regime, which in context of crisis creates a pathway for fascists to take control of the state.

I would be critical of it, both from my anti-capitalist commitments to be critical of police (I also agree with the police abolition movement which has become very strong in the United States recently, coming from the black rad-

ical tradition of seeing its roots in the United States as coming from slave catching patrols and the maintenance of a white supremacist society), and the more specific point I was making about this kind of specific political tradition.

Mark, thank you so much for your time. It was a pleasure hearing from you.

Bye.

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