

Fascism and the Omnipresence of Communication¹

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Abstract: This paper will investigate the intersection between fascism and social media communication. Drawing from Christian Fuchs's notion of digital fascism and placing it in dialogue with other Marxist literature, the paper will argue that the state retains a centering role in the organization of fascism as against the post-organizational position which highlights its ambivalent, fluid, and decentered character. The paper will further argue that the propagandistic character of fascism requires it to instrumentalize technical specifications of communications technologies. What (digital) fascism instrumentalizes today is what will be developed as the omnipresence of communication, primarily supported by the complexities of today's internet powered social media. The paper will examine fascism as it has taken place in the Duterte-Marcos Jr. fascist continuity in the Philippines. The paper will conclude by proposing a kind of anti-fascism that goes beyond the ecosystems of the social media, reiterating both technical as well as socio-political transformations required to overcome fascism.

Keywords: fascism, ideology, terror-tagging, communication

This paper will investigate the intersection between the Duterte-Marcos fascist continuity and social media communication. The investigation concerning such an intersection is not new. Some scholars have already done similar projects in the past.² These interventions have examined

¹ This research is part of the author's postdoctoral project conducted last 2023 at the University of Vienna. The author would like to thank the Ernst Mach ASEA-UNINET Fellowship Grant and the Faculty, REPS, and Administrative Staff Development Program of the University of the Philippines for their financial support.

² See Antoine Acker, "How Fascism Went Digital: A Historian's Perspective on Bolsonaro's Victory in Brazil," in *Geschichte der Gegenwart* (7 November 2018), <<https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/how-fascism-went-digital-a-historians-perspective-on->

the intersection between fascism and social media but have mainly focused on grassroots level initiatives that have provided effective support for the rise of fascism through social media. Without totally discounting the conclusions derived from these existing interventions, the paper will show how the one-sided preoccupation with supposed mass-driven support or grassroots level initiatives for fascism tends to obscure the centering and organizing function of the state behind all the supposed confusions of social media's networked activities. The said one-sidedness may even absolve, or at the very least, diminish the role of the state and the ruling class in organizing fascism and give an incorrect picture of an exhaustively manipulated and irredeemable masses. Further, the said view tends to advance a partial conception of fascism that isolates it in and only within "the ecosystems of social media."³

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri had already traced the relation between communication and power in their book, *Empire*. At the beginning of the present century when the internet and particularly the social media were still in their infantile stages, Hardt and Negri were able to identify "communication systems" and "information networks" to be the media that could organize and control brains and bodies. While sharp in their recognition of how power could ultimately unravel itself through complex networks, their work understandably does not sufficiently touch on the intersection between social media communication and fascist power.⁴ Christian Fuchs's book *Digital Fascism* is perhaps the most comprehensive intervention on the matter so far. It opened by asking the question "how is fascism communicated on the Internet?"⁵ Drawing from the debates within and across various theoretical traditions as well as empirical investigations of how right-wing, authoritarian, and fascist discourse is communicated and is shaping both the online and the concrete world today, Fuchs developed a new concept of fascism that, while preserves "the general characteristics of fascism," is also "in certain ways different from previous forms" of it. Fuchs called this as digital fascism, the "communication of fascism online as well as the fascist groups' and individuals' use of digital technologies as means of information, communication, and organisation [sic]."⁶

bolsonaros-victory-in-brazil/>; Maik Fielitz and Holger Marcks, "Digital Fascism: Challenges for the Open Society in Times of Social Media," in *UC Berkeley: Center for Right-Wing Studies* (16 July 2019), <<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/87w5c5gp>>; and Wolfram Schaffar, "New Social Media and Politics in Thailand: The Emergence of Fascist Vigilante Groups on Facebook," in *Advances in Southeast Asian Studies*, 9, no. 2 (2016), 215–234.

³ Fielitz and Marcks, "Digital Fascism."

⁴ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 23.

⁵ Christian Fuchs, *Digital Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3, 318.

Drawing from Fuchs's concept of fascism and placing it in dialogue with other Marxist literature, this paper will examine how the Duterte-Marcos fascist continuity has taken place in the Philippines through and beyond social media. The paper will argue that the state retains a centering or organizing role in today's fascism. Further, coming from existing literature and developing David Auerbach's concept of a meganet, the paper will argue how the Duterte-Marcos fascist continuity has taken advantage of the technical specifications of today's social media. It will contend that social media's technical specifications provided the possibility for an omnipresence of communication, an important condition which the Duterte-Marcos fascist continuity has taken advantage in the consolidation of fascism in the country.

The paper will be divided into four parts. After a brief introduction, the paper will discuss the ideological dimension of fascism, its need to communicate and take advantage of communications technologies, and how it is primarily organized by the state. The third section will develop what will be called an omnipresence of communication as the very condition for the communication of fascist ideology today. The last section will conclude the paper by forwarding an anti-fascist position beyond the ecosystems of the social media.

Fascism and the Anti-Terror Ideology

There is no homogeneous and single accepted definition of fascism. It carries with it the opposing conceptions proponents and critics alike have developed throughout history. The earliest proponents of fascism conceived it as a social movement and a statist intervention of party ideologues that aim simultaneously at, on the one hand, a kind of national and spiritual restoration and, on the other hand, a systematic and terroristic eradication of supposed impure social elements (Marxists, communists, Jews, etc.).⁷ Critics would later critically use the term to describe either of the following: an exceptional form of state that corresponds to a particular conjunctural crisis (Poulantzas); an allied dictatorship of the fascist party, bureaucracy, army, and big business (Neumann); a movement whose social basis is traceable to specific classes, their configurations, and their anti-communist interests (Gramsci); a social pathology resulting more from specific social tendencies than from historical circumstance and education or the lack thereof and whose psychology is "largely engendered by manipulation" (Adorno); finally, a ruthless regime in the peripheries to further consolidate global

⁷ See Benito Mussolini, "The Political And Social Doctrine Of Fascism," in *The Political Quarterly*, 4, no. 3 (1933), 341-356; Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (New York: Hurst and Blacklett Ltd, 1939).

neoliberalism (Amin and Mongaya).⁸ Despite the divergence of meanings, these conceptualizations of fascism, whether those advanced by the proponents or by the critics, affirm its inherently propagandistic character. For example, the Nazis saw the importance of radio and consciously utilized broadcast technology for their propagandistic objectives, giving the communications apparatus a dominant place vis-à-vis the other ideological state apparatus during the period of Nazi fascism.⁹

Fascism, then and now, has strategically exploited technology and media for its propagandistic objectives. Stanley Payne described how Nazi fascism consolidated itself through propaganda by making use of “all forms of the media.”¹⁰ Roger Griffin explained how the Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels recognized “the power of the latest technology of mass communications” then in the supposed rebirth of Germany. Such a technological power amplified the propagandistic language of fascism which likewise enabled the coordination and channeling of “the creative energies of a modern, highly pluralistic nation into a ‘spiritual’ force” that provides cohesion for an “organic national community.”¹¹ Herbert Marcuse argued how Nazi Germany sustained its reign of terror “not only by brute force” but also by the “ingenious manipulation of the power inherent in technology” among which is technology and mass media’s power to advance propaganda.¹² In fact, Nazi fascism even transformed the use of new forms of advanced technology, such as the radio then. From a purely individualized means of cultural consumption, it was specifically transformed by the Nazis as a mass media and a means for mass mobilization.¹³ This view is also

⁸ See Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship: The Third International and the Problem of Fascism* (London: Verso Books, 2019); Franz Leopold Neumann, *European Trade Unionism and Politics*, ed. by Carl Raushenbush (New York: League for Industrial Democracy, 1936); Antonio Gramsci, “The Two Fascisms” (1921), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/1921/08/two_fascisms.htm>; Theodor Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. by Henry Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. by Jay M. Bernstein (New York: Routledge, 1991); Samir Amin, “The Return of Fascism in Contemporary Capitalism,” in *Monthly Review* (1 September 2014), <<https://monthlyreview.org/2014/09/01/the-return-of-fascism-in-contemporary-capitalism/>>; and Karlo Mikhail Mongaya, “Fascism, Fascisation, and Neoliberalism from Marcos to Duterte,” in *In Authoritarian Disaster: The Duterte Regime and the Prospects for a Marcos Presidency*, ed. by Regletto Aldrich Imbong (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2023).

⁹ Cf. Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda During World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006) and Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship*.

¹⁰ Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 167.

¹¹ Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 253.

¹² Herbert Marcuse, *Technology, War, and Fascism*, ed. by Douglas Kellner (New York: Routledge, 1998), 41.

¹³ Cf. Payne, *A History of Fascism*.

maintained by the cultural Marxist Raymond Williams who explained that there was no prior developed mass use of radio than that in Nazi Germany, where “under Goebbel’s orders the Party organized compulsory listening groups and the receivers were in the streets.”¹⁴ Fascism is an example of how technical specifications of technology are made to serve the most nefarious and oppressive ends.

Today’s fascism and several other milder populist and illiberal regimes have similarly taken advantage of communications technology to further their political objectives. For example, social media has been a contentious site where both democratic and authoritarian views flourish and produce effects in the real world. While the internet and social media have initially promised greater democratization, it has, as noted by Ignas Kalpokas, “not only fulfilled but also exceeded this promise,” as it has likewise democratized truth.¹⁵ Scholars have taken note of how social media has abetted the rise of a political condition shaped by a supposed indistinction, or better yet, a manipulation of truth and falsity to serve nefarious ends.¹⁶ An extreme determinist reading, which will be criticized subsequently, even suggested that “social media offers a beneficial terrain for the far right,” as “elements of social media” not only support far-right interests but also “stimulate perceptions of imperilment.”¹⁷

Fascism necessarily utilizes or takes a discursive form because of its ideological dimension. As elucidated by Christian Fuchs, fascism both has its economic and ideological dimensions.¹⁸ Not only the economic contradictions, such as capital’s tendency to exhaust super profits from an already impoverished yet unyielding workforce, shape the development of a fascist regime but also the employment of specific ideologies whose effects, directly or indirectly, serve the consolidation of fascism. Yet ideology works its way through the realm of meaning, employing signs that, according to the Soviet philosopher Valentin Voloshinov, without it, ideology is impossible. In further elucidating this ideological dimension of fascism, one can extend

¹⁴ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 17.

¹⁵ Ignas Kalpokas, *A Political Theory of Post-Truth* (Switzerland: Springer, 2018), 26.

¹⁶ Cf. See Nora Martin, “Journalism, the Pressures of Verification and Notions of Post-Truth in Civil Society,” in *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 9, no. 2 (2017), 41–56; Serena Guisti and Elisa Piras, *Democracy and Fake News: Information Manipulation and Post-Truth Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2020); Tetiana Viktorivna Kovalova and O. Yevstushenko, “Overcoming the Challenges of Post-Truth in Modern Socio-Cultural Communication,” in *Obraz*, 1, no. 38 (2022), <<https://essuir.sumdu.edu.ua/handle/123456789/88007>>; and Kalpokas, *A Political Theory of Post-Truth*.

¹⁷ Fielitz and Marcks, “Digital Fascism,” 1–2.

¹⁸ See Fuchs, *Digital Fascism*.

Voloshinov's thesis that "without signs there is no ideology" to also mean that without the manipulation of signs there is no fascism.¹⁹ But since signs are socially embedded, it could only take shape within specific forms of social intercourse or in the exchanges of utterances and statements between individuals and groups, that is, through discourse.²⁰ Here lies the importance and why fascism takes advantage of communication and the various technologies that support it. Communications technology, like the social media of today, is instrumentalized to serve the manipulation of signs in a manner peculiar to its technical specifications.

As mentioned earlier, Fuchs's definition of digital fascism includes the important component of communication where fascism utilizes digital technologies "as means of information, communication, and organisation [sic]."²¹ What is being informed and communicated here is the fascist ideology as it assumes a discursive form whose effects are felt through the various (re)organizations of institutions and the entire social life according to the ideology in question. For example, by spreading the propaganda of the "rich exploiting Jew" during the Nazi period, an anti-Semitic ideology was not only informed and communicated to appease the mystified petty-bourgeoisie but also, through it, organized certain effects that "shifts the anti-capitalism of the petty-bourgeois masses onto the Jews" and aligns them towards fascism's colonial and imperialist interests.²² A more contemporary example is how the palingenetic populist ultra-nationalist ideology was deployed by fascist groups in Thailand to organize a sort of witch hunt against individuals accused of violating the *lèse-majesté*. Vigilante-like fascist groups communicated this ideology through Facebook and has effectively mobilized a large following, both online and offline.²³

Every fascism mobilizes distinct and makes dominant ideologies strategic to its interests. Nazi fascism mobilized anti-Semitic and anti-communist ideologies while contemporary forms of fascism/authoritarianism/right-wing extremism deploy varying ideologies: racist, ultranationalist, militarist, "anti-oligarchic," among many others.²⁴ Ideologies are strategic because they are not abstract signs devoid of a performative dimension. Eagleton suggested and likewise fine-tuned a broad definition of ideology, which considers it as "a body of meanings and values

¹⁹ Valentin Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. by Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 9.

²⁰ Cf. Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso Books, 1991).

²¹ Fuchs, *Digital Fascism*, 318.

²² Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship*, 255.

²³ Cf. Schaffar, "New Social Media and Politics in Thailand."

²⁴ Cf. Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship*.

encoding certain interests relevant to social power.”²⁵ For Eagleton, ideologies are strategic because they take concrete forms and assume functionalities that work to unify, orient action, rationalize, legitimize, universalize, and naturalize social power.

The Duterte-Marcos fascist continuity likewise mobilizes specific ideologies strategic to its interests. Among these are the family and democracy ideologies, present in the very discourse of The National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC).²⁶ To supposedly gain the sympathies and ensure consensus of the Filipinos for its notorious counterinsurgency campaign, the NTF-ELCAC stokes fears concerning how communist insurgency has purportedly endangered the lives of the youth, the stability of the family, and the flourishing of democracy. Without discounting the realities of a violent communist insurgency driven by socio-economic maladies,²⁷ the one-sided manner in which the NTF-ELCAC constructs a supposed imperiled future of the family and democracy rests mainly on manipulation and disinformation. For example, among the figures that it mobilized to strengthen its family ideology is the youth activist Alicia Lucena whom the NTF-ELCAC alleged to have been recruited/kidnapped by the communist insurgents. A common hashtag the NTF-ELCAC uses is the #HandsOffOurChildren, alleging a form of notorious communist indoctrination and abduction. However, what the NTF-ELCAC deliberately hid was the fact that it was Lucena herself who confessed that she did not feel safe in a home suspicious of her activism and so decided to leave. Alicia was able to assert her legitimacy as a legal activist and prove the accusations of the NTF-ELCAC and her family wrong.²⁸ With regards to the NTF-ELCAC’s supposed defense of democracy against the communist insurgents, one could only wonder what kind of democracy it is talking about especially that it has been part and defensive of regimes associated with gross abuse of democratic processes and principles, regimes that are even very adamant about allowing the International Criminal Court to conduct an

²⁵ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 45.

²⁶ See Regletto Imbong, “The Performativity of Terror-Tagging and the Prospects for a Marcos Presidency,” in *Authoritarian Disaster: The Duterte Regime and the Prospects for a Marcos Presidency*.

²⁷ Cf. Regletto Imbong, “Forging a Just and Lasting Peace in the Philippines,” in *Peace Review*, 31, no. 1 (2019), 66–73.

²⁸ Mark Lavarro, “‘I Don’t Feel Safe Here:’ For the 7th Time, Youth Activist Alicia Leaves Home,” in *Bulatlat: Journalism for the People* (17 August 2021), <<https://www.bulatlat.com/2021/08/17/i-dont-feel-safe-here-for-the-7th-time-youth-activist-alicia-leaves-home/>>.

investigation concerning possible crimes against humanity committed by Duterte himself.²⁹

What unites both the family and democracy ideology discursively advanced by the NTF-ELCAC is the anti-terror ideology. On the one hand, such an ideology functions to ensure what Fuchs identified as one of the four elements of fascism: the friend-enemy scheme. Briefly, the friend-enemy scheme constructs socio-political scapegoats who are “presented as society’s ills and as the causes of social problems.”³⁰ The anti-terror ideology expresses itself discursively through terror-tagging. Through terror-tagging, political scapegoats are conveniently constructed that, according to Fuchs, “distract from social problem’s foundations in class inequality and power asymmetries.”³¹ Without any due process, terror-tagging labels as terrorists virtually anyone whom the NTF-ELCAC deems as its enemy: leftist individuals and organizations, the opposition, celebrities, civil society-initiated community pantries, a bookstore, a judge, a city mayor, a bishop, or a university chancellor, among many others.³²

²⁹ Jason Gutierrez, “Philippines Officially Leaves the International Criminal Court,” in *The New York Times* (17 March 2019), <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/17/world/asia/philippines-international-criminal-court.html>>; also “Philippines Will Not Cooperate with ICC in Drugs War Probe, Marcos Says,” in *Reuters* (21 July 2023), <<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-will-not-cooperate-with-icc-drugs-war-probe-marcos-2023-07-21/>>.

³⁰ Christian Fuchs, “Authoritarian Capitalism, Authoritarian Movements and Authoritarian Communication,” in *Media, Culture & Society*, 40, no. 5 (2018), 783.

³¹ Fuchs, *Digital Fascism*, 17.

³² See Bea Cupin, “After SONA, VP Duterte Goes All out in Taunting, Red-Tagging Makabayan Bloc,” in *Rappler* (1 August 2022), <<https://www.rappler.com/nation/sara-duterte-goes-taunting-red-tagging-makabayan-bloc-august-2022>>; Brynch Bonachita, “Robredo Red-Tagged in Streamers on Eve of Leyte Visit,” in *Rappler* (29 March 2022), <<https://www.rappler.com/nation/elections/leni-robredo-red-tagged-streamers-leyte-visit-march-28-2022>>; Bea Cupin, “ABS-CBN Defends Angel Locsin, Liza Soberano against Red-Tagging,” in *Rappler* (23 October 2020), <<https://www.rappler.com/entertainment/celebrities/abs-cbn-statement-defending-angel-locsin-liza-soberano-parlade-red-tagging>>; Iya Gozum, “Red-Tagging of Community Pantry Sparks Uproar Online,” in *Rappler* (20 April 2021), <<https://www.rappler.com/moveph/philippine-government-red-tagging-community-pantry-sparks-uproar-online>>; Angelica Demegillo, “Groups Decry Red-Tagging, Vandalism of Two Metro Manila Bookstores,” in *CNN Philippines* (24 March 2022), <<https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2022/3/24/anti-communist-vandalism-bookstores-manila.html>>; Angel Yabut, “Judge Attacked Online for Junking Terror Tag on CPP-NPA | Inquirer News,” in *Inquirer.Net* (25 September 2022), <<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1669815/judge-attacked-online-for-junking-terror-tag-on-cpp-npa>>; “Red-Tagged Anew, Baguio’s Magalong Warns of Legal Action,” in *Philstar* (16 January 2023), <<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2023/01/16/2237983/red-tagged-anew-baguios-magalong-warns-legal-action>>; “Red-Tagged Bishop Alminaza: ‘I Cannot Be Silent amid Violence and Injustices,’” in *Rappler* (24 February 2023), <<https://www.rappler.com/nation/visayas/bishop-alminaza-says-cannot-be-silent-violence-injustices>>; and “UP Cebu Students, Faculty Condemn Red-Tagging of Malagars,” in *ABS-CBN*

On the other hand, the anti-terror ideology has strategically produced effects that, to a certain extent, regulated the conduct and identities of institutions according to the ideology in question. For example, the anti-terror ideology has introduced certain regulations in governmentality, limiting and penalizing any action of government units deemed supportive of the left and other progressive forces.³³ Likewise, it has sanctioned a type of education supposedly purged from a terrorist-influenced knowledge by banning books from libraries, stopping books from being printed, and terror-tagging a publishing house.³⁴ Similarly, it has continued to impose a militarist education through making mandatory the Reserve Officers' Training Corps.³⁵ Lastly, it has challenged even the meanings of collective identities shaped through hard struggle as it denounced the decades-long use of the term *Lumad* which signifies the unity of ethno-linguistic groups determined to oppose state and imperialist aggression.³⁶ And these regulations come within a backdrop of rising cases of human rights violations such as abductions, tortures, harassments, and political killings many of whom had terror-tagging incidents in the past. The anti-terror ideology's construction of an enemy image has allowed the fascist continuity to invoke such an image in the organization of institutions and in the institutionalization of terror.³⁷

What is observable is how the anti-terror ideology could be traced as primarily generated and shaped by the state, through the NTF-ELCAC. The study conducted by Don Kevin Hapal and Raisa Serafica revealed how the NTF-ELCAC to be "at the center of the network of Facebook pages and

News (30 September 2022), <<https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/09/30/22/up-cebu-students-faculty-condemn-red-tagging-of-malagars>>.

³³ "DILG Warns LGUs Not to Pay 'Permit to Campaign Fees' to the NPA," in *DILG CALABARZON News* (14 January 2019), <<http://news.calabarzon.dilg.gov.ph/3749/dilg-warns-lgus-not-to-pay-permit-to-campaign-fees-to-the-npa>>.

³⁴ Elvira Ramirez-Cohn, "Anger as University Books Purge Described as 'Academic Freedom,'" in *University World News* (9 November 2021), <<https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20211109172041360>>; Joseph Peter Calleja, "Philippines Bans Five 'Subversive' Textbooks," in *Ucanews.Com* (15 August 2022), <<https://www.ucanews.com/news/philippines-bans-five-subversive-textbooks/98401>>.

³⁵ Bonz Magsombol, "Sara Duterte's Push for Mandatory Military Service Shows 'True Militarist Nature' - Groups," in *Rappler* (22 January 2022), <<https://www.rappler.com/nation/groups-reactions-sara-duterte-proposal-mandatory-military-service-filipino-youth>>.

³⁶ Marita Moaje, "Drop 'Lumad', Use Ethnic Group Names Instead: NCIP," in *Philippine News Agency* (4 March 2021), <<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1132620>>.

³⁷ Jove Jim Aguas, Paolo Bolaños, and Jovito Cariño have argued how, by criminalizing the "spectre of terror" through the anti-terror law, the nation has been placed under a "permanent state of exception." See Jove Jim Aguas, Paolo Bolaños, and Jovito Cariño, "The Spectre of Terror: Philippine Democracy and the Threat of the New (Ab)normal," in *Interfere: Journal for Critical Thought and Radical Politics* (28 August 2020), <<https://interferejournal.org/2020/08/28/the-spectre-of-terror/>>.

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groups pushing out [terror-tagging] content.”³⁸ This networked propaganda works on a sophisticated relation between what can be called as the central and amplifying layers. These layers are composed of clusters of Facebook pages and groups that distribute terror-tagging contents in Facebook either to the general public or to niche but engaged communities. The central layer is composed of the Facebook page of the NTF-ELCAC along with other state-owned media (like the Philippine News Agency and the Philippine Television Network) and official military channels. This layer generates the main discursive terror-tagging contents. These state institutions comprise the central layer and together with the amplifying layer shape a counterinsurgency discourse governed by the anti-terror ideology. The study further elaborated the relationship between the central and amplifying layers by indicating how terror-tagging content from the NTF-ELCAC is shared in hundreds of Facebook pages and groups of the amplifying layer thereby distributing in an exponential manner the content generated from the former.

Through the NTF-ELCAC, the state assumes an organizing and centering role not only in the exponential distribution of terror-tagging contents but also in generating effects that allow further the consolidation of fascism. The organizing and centering role of the NTF-ELCAC, through its Facebook page, offers an insight of how digital fascism has taken place, at least in the Philippines, and challenges the claim of Fielitz and Marcks that digital fascism is “highly fluid and ambivalent” which “lacks a clear organizational center” and which identifies the “digitally networked masses” to be the “engine of their own manipulation.”³⁹

Coming from a post-organizational framework, Fielitz and Marcks remarked that fascism cannot be “fully grasped with actor- or ideology-centered approaches” but rather requires an analysis of it as a “social phenomenon of cultural practices.” Such a fluidity and ambivalence is supposedly a result of “opportunity structures” in social media “that are particularly beneficial for far-right agency.” The feedback loop of today’s social media supposedly renders indistinct the boundaries between activists and audience as even the latter take part of the “swarm-like penetration of online discussion boards” which provides the conditions for their self-engineered manipulation. Amidst this swarm is the supposed decentralized movement that integrates individuals into sub-cultures of virtual networks characterized by a “leaderless, dispersed digital resistance that is tailored to the needs of online activism.” Out from this decentralized movement grows

³⁸ Don Kevin Hapal and Raisa Serafica, “New War: How the Propaganda Network Shifted from Targeting ‘addicts’ to Activists,” in *Rappler* (3 October 2021), <<https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/investigative/how-propaganda-network-created-online-environment-justifies-shifted-killing-activists>>.

³⁹ Fielitz and Marcks, “Digital Fascism.”

“digital structures of the masses” that “may produce new orders of perception prone to fascism.”⁴⁰

Fielitz and Marcks considered digital fascism to be a “family-like variation” of classical fascism whose fascist core feature, however, derives its dynamics “out of social structures in the digital world” and not from the interplay of classes, institutions, and social forces. Given the peculiarities of a highly fluid, ambivalent, leaderless, and mass-driven digital fascism, Fielitz and Marcks concluded that in digital fascism, the political opponent is “an intangible one, leaving civil society actors confused about how to approach the phenomenon and how to pinpoint who or what exactly has to be countered.”⁴¹

Coming from a determinist reading of social media which considers its opportunity structures as supposedly inherently advantageous to the far-right, Fielitz and Marcks advanced a reified conceptualization of social media, treating it as something that not only attains a life of its own but also “structures” contemporary fascism, or at least its conditions. Their analysis ironically construes social media to be a structuring thing/agent responsible for today’s leaderless, fluid, and centerless fascism. Reification fragments and dislocates aspects of the social experience taking the part for the whole and likewise construes objects as “facts governed by laws to which the individuals can only relate through technical or strategic practices.”⁴² Fielitz and Marcks speak of a digital fascism as something as emerging online and dislocated from the totality of real-life contradictions, one which emerges through and only within “the ecosystems of social media.” Their reading “fetishized” social media as though it is a “misty realm of religion” where its agentless products appear autonomous and take a life of their own.⁴³

While classical fascism also utilized communications technology such as the broadcast radio, it never came to a point that a certain “broadcast fascism” was then conceptualized as something as reified as the digital fascism understood by Fielitz and Marcks. Fascist radio propaganda should be seen as an aspect or moment of the totality of fascism. The ultimate danger here is a kind of absolution for agents who hide behind the chaos and swarm of misinformed masses, despite the former’s culpability for such a phenomenon. While the study of Fielitz and Marcks tested an argument of Antoine Acker concerning digital fascism, it fails to mention that even Acker recognized that in Brazil during Jair Bolsonaro’s presidential campaign,

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2–15.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴² Andrew Feenberg, *The Ruthless Critique of Everything Existing: Nature and Revolution in Marcuse’s Philosophy of Praxis* (New York: Verso Books, 2023), 45.

⁴³ Cf. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, trans. by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 165.

“hundreds of businessmen involved themselves in massive electoral fraud at the service of the PSL.”⁴⁴ Acker continued that “in complete illegality, companies paid up to four million dollars each to acquire users’ data, to create Whatsapp groups and bombard millions of private accounts with defamation of PT candidates.” And a crucial observation of Acker is that “once such a poison is *introduced* into the digital world, mass manipulation quickly becomes a participative process powered by the masses themselves.”⁴⁵ A similar situation was also observed in the Philippine elections last 2016. The appearance of a leaderless swarm activity was laid bare as a networked and organized disinformation campaign whose core is composed of wealthy politicians contracting elite advertising and PR strategists. The latter organized political deception with responsibilities distributed to “diverse and loosely interconnected groups of hierarchized digital workers.”⁴⁶ Without a class of business and/or political interests whose economic power allows them even the most minimal yet effective introduction of disinformation and, in the case of the Philippines, an exploited precarious digital workforce, such a “mass manipulation” would have been at the very least difficult to engineer. Unlike Fielitz and Marcks, Fuchs takes into account the contradictions between classical and contemporary fascism but did not ignore how the latter “combines a central ideological apparatus with the organization of user-generated post-truth, user-generated fake news and filter bubbles that spread fascist ideology.”⁴⁷ A central “ideological apparatus” is a state apparatus, one which allows the overall organization of fascism, taking into account the diversity of tactics within the general contemporary fascist strategy, where it simultaneously employs direct tactics of domination and the more subtle ones hidden behind what it fuels and tolerates as disinformation-driven swarm activity of the masses.

Understanding digital fascism requires piercing through social media’s religion-like misty realm, comprehending its technical complexity and how such a complexity has been made to serve fascism by real-life actors and social forces. Shattering this mysticism means going beyond the appearance of complexity and confusion to identify (state/class) agents who not only are responsible but also has to be made accountable for real-life fascist atrocities such as those that has been taking place in the Philippines.

⁴⁴ Acker, “How Fascism Went Digital.”

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Jonathan Ong and Jason Vincent Cabañes, “Architects of Networked Disinformation: Behind the Scenes of Troll Accounts and Fake News Production in the Philippines,” in *Scholarworks @UMassAmherst* (2018), 15, <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1075&context=communication_faculty_pubs>.

⁴⁷ Fuchs, *Digital Fascism*, 321.

To do so, one needs to understand social media, its technical specifications, and how the state has taken advantage of its potential to consolidate fascism.

The NTF-ELCAC and the Omnipresence of Communication

In December 2018 by virtue of the Executive Order 70 signed by Duterte, the NTF-ELCAC was established with the aim of “synchronizing the government’s instrumentalities of power” through a whole-of-nation approach of counterinsurgency.⁴⁸ Scholars have already pointed how the NTF-ELCAC effectively subordinated not only national government agencies but also local government units to the demands of a militaristic counterinsurgency program.⁴⁹ In this way, authoritarianism was brought to a level unprecedented in the past with counterinsurgency as a shared if not imposed imperative for civilian government agencies and units to follow. It is alarming how critical voices in different government instrumentalities are either harassed or threatened, as in the case of Baguio City Mayor Benjamin Magalong and other progressive lawmakers under the *Makabayan Bloc* or silenced by assassination as in the case of Councilor Bernardino Patigdas.⁵⁰ Such repressive acts show how said government instrumentalities are coerced to work in a whole-of-nation militaristic counterinsurgency program.

The NTF-ELCAC is composed of twelve operational clusters, each with its own lead agency/agencies and support agencies. Two important features are observable in the composition of the clusters. First, the appearance of civilian supremacy where no operational cluster is headed by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). However, the AFP is present in every operational cluster as a “support” agency. But the organizational disposition of the agency betrays its militarist orientation. The NTF-ELCAC is co-chaired by the national security adviser who, both during the regimes of Duterte and Marcos Jr., are military men: former Gen. Hermogenes

⁴⁸ “Executive Order No. 7,” in the *Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines* (2018), <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2018/12dec/20181204-EO-70-RRD.pdf?_cf_chl_tk=xwOKkfQNm.UuAszI4vTh_DgNjKp8RvVTYSa49CtBglQ-1714179864-0.0.1.1-1599>.

⁴⁹ Sonny Africa, “Counterproductive Counterinsurgency,” in *Ibon* (17 November 2019), <<https://www.ibon.org/counterproductive-counterinsurgency>>; Imbong, “The Performativity of Terror-Tagging.”

⁵⁰ See “Red-Tagged Anew, Baguio’s Magalong Warns of Legal Action”; “Press Release - Red-Tagging of Makabayan Bloc Another Diversionary Scheme - De Lima,” in *Senate of the Philippines* (3 December 2020), <https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/press_release/2020/1203_delima1.asp>; and Marche Espina, “Negros Occidental City Councilor Shot Dead,” in *Rappler* (23 April 2019), <<https://www.rappler.com/nation/228768-negros-occidental-city-councilor-shot-dead-april-22-2019>>.

Esperon and former Gen. Eduardo Año, respectively. Just recently, the daughter of former president Duterte and Education Secretary Sara Duterte was also named co-chair of the NTF-ELCAC. The NTF-ELCAC is chaired by the president himself. Second, the importance it assigns to strategic communication through the creation of the cluster called Strategic Communication Cluster (SCC). This is led by the Presidential Communications Operations Office which is also present in every operational cluster as a support agency.

In an earlier 2017-2022 National Security Policy, the Duterte regime recognized the importance of national consensus and a shared understanding or appreciation of national security. Such a consensus, understanding, and appreciation was seen as the “basis for collective action” to address the most pressing national security concerns, with counterinsurgency as the number one priority. The Policy continued that “creating a culture of national unity and cohesiveness requires effectively communicating ... the Government’s aims and intentions to the Filipino public.”⁵¹ Given how important communication is in ensuring the national security goals,

the government shall harness all available communication platforms—news outfits, social media, and private think tanks, among others—for information sharing and advocacy, and for promoting collaboration and policy feedback system.⁵²

The mention of social media as an important communication platform in advancing the national security goals is unprecedented in Philippine history. For example, this was never mentioned in the National Security Policy of the previous regime of Benigno Aquino III, which mentioned the term communication twice but not given any strategic importance. Of course, this is understandable given the levels of development of social media and information technology between the two regimes. The appreciation given to strategic communication, which includes social media, was consolidated by the NTF-ELCAC. As the SCC of the NTF-ELCAC explained, strategic communication efforts shall be conducted “to effectively disseminate information on government programs and counter national propaganda of the [communist terrorist groups], while creating external

⁵¹ “National Security Policy for Change and Well-Being of the Filipino People: 2017-2022,” in *National Security Council* (2017), <<https://nsc.gov.ph/attachments/article/NSP/NSP-2017-2022.pdf>>.

⁵² *Ibid.*

mechanisms to facilitate public engagement and policy support.”⁵³ As will be explained subsequently, the technicalities of social media supported what the National Security Council (NSC) and the NTF-ELCAC, respectively, raised as the need for a “policy feedback system” and “public engagement and policy support.”

Counterinsurgency strategic communication through social media was initiated by the Duterte regime and later continued by the Marcos Jr. regime. Counterinsurgency strategic communication is omnipresent, in two senses. First, it is omnipresent in an organizational sense. It is shared not only by all the operational clusters under the NTF-ELCAC but also participated by multi-level state actors that push counterinsurgency discourses through their Facebook pages. The research of Hapal and Serafica revealed the dynamics of a networked propaganda composed of layers of agents that push terror-tagging content, the structure of counterinsurgency discourse shaped by the NTF-ELCAC.

Second, it is omnipresent in a technical sense. While counterinsurgency propaganda was already practiced in the past, this was done through the available technical means then, the broadcast technology. In general, broadcast technology follows the one-to-many flow of communication as characterized by radio and television.⁵⁴ Williams elaborated the material developments that shaped broadcast technology then. He explained that broadcast technology is not only a means of communication that preceded its content but also something that enabled a form of “mobile privatization,” which combined the “apparently paradoxical yet deeply connected tendencies of modern urban industrial living:” mobility and the self-sufficiency of the home. A “general intake, within the home” takes place as it offered a variety of social intake like music, news, and entertainment, through “central transmitters and the domestic sets.”⁵⁵ Inherent within the broadcast technology is the contradiction between centralized transmission and individualized or privatized reception.

With the rise and eventual development of the internet, it provided the possibility for a large-scale many-to-many flow and feedback of information. Furthermore, the development of smartphones “augured an era of being always online, always reachable.”⁵⁶ Unlike the broadcast days where

⁵³ “National Security Policy 2011-2016: Securing the Gains of Democracy,” in *National Security Council* (2011), <<https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2011/08aug/NATIONAL-SECURITY-POLICY-2011-2016.pdf>>.

⁵⁴ Cf. David Auerbach, *Meganets: How Digital Forces Beyond Our Control Commandeer Our Daily Lives and Inner Realities* (New York: Public Affairs, 2023), EPUB.

⁵⁵ Williams, *Television*, 19–23.

⁵⁶ Auerbach, *Meganets*, Chapter 1.

information sources are localized in some bulky devices at home, the age of the internet and smartphones universalized the possibility of not only everyone sharing, receiving, and feedbacking information at once but also doing these operations virtually anywhere in their internet-enabled portable devices. Social media is an example of how this many-to-many flow of communication and feedback loop simultaneously takes place. Here, there is not only a universal intake characteristic of the broadcast technology but also a universal discharge of communication taking place simultaneously in a feedbacking loop. Not only this, the simultaneous activities of intake and discharge this time go beyond the confines of a self-sufficient home. In fact, the “home” has been integrated as an essential page in most social media platform, providing an interface that feeds an endless flow of engageable and potentially viral contents. Home has been everywhere but nowhere, omnipresent in its existence but within the technicality of the portable device.

The extent as well as the dynamics of communication’s omnipresence can be better grasped by employing David Auerbach’s notion of meganets. For Auerbach, a meganet is “*a persistent, evolving, and opaque data network that controls how we see the world.*” It is persistent because it is never offline and never reset. Likewise, it also has the “ability to respond to changes and update itself, keeping in sync with the world.” It is evolving because it is constantly being modified by the interaction of millions of entities, from programmers, users, to artificial intelligences (AIs). And it is opaque because “it is difficult and frequently impossible to gauge why the meganet behaved in a particular way.”⁵⁷ Social media is an example of a meganet. Facebook, for example, is never offline. One could log oneself out from it, but the program and its contents persist. It is also evolving especially given how various actors, like a social media community and its programmers, interact to change, for example, its community standards. And it is also opaque because none of the actors involved could actually ensure transparent control over what thrives and develops in social media. For example, after the Cambridge Analytica scandal, Facebook’s chief technology officer asked its director of AI to “examine the societal impact of the company’s algorithms.” This after the fact call for reflection suggests how ambiguous the relationship is between the technical aspect of a “social” media and its effects to the “social.”⁵⁸ Here, one is reminded and likewise could reiterate how, for Williams as in the case of broadcast technology, the technology precedes the content in a manner that reflection only comes after a supposedly technology-instigated tragedy.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵⁸ Karen Hao, “How Facebook Got Addicted to Spreading Misinformation,” in MIT Technology Review (11 March 2021), <<https://www.technologyreview.com/2021/03/11/1020600/facebook-responsible-ai-misinformation>>.

A meganet facilitates communication and discourse. In fact, a meganet discourse has three essential components: volume, velocity, and virality. Volume refers to the enormous amount of data that is stored and retrievable thanks to the development of powerful computers.⁵⁹ In the case of Facebook, it generates four petabytes of data everyday stored in what is called as the Hive. A petabyte is a thousand terabytes. This component of volume has allowed the storage and retrieval of persistent posts.⁶⁰

But the crucial component of a meganet discourse is not so much the volume as the velocity and virality that give meganet discourse a qualitatively different character. Velocity refers to the meganet's brain to only think fast, never slow. Auerbach cites the psychologist and economist Daniel Kahneman who differentiated the brain's capacity to think either fast or slow, either reactive judgment or reflective consideration. Auerbach suggested that meganet's velocity is one of reactive and fast judgment rather than reflective and slow deliberation.⁶¹ The distinction between reactive and reflective could be further illustrated using the *Erfahrung-Erlebnis* distinction. Following Walter Benjamin, Feenberg notes that *Erfahrung* is an "experience shaped by a deep relation to reality," while *Erlebnis* is a "momentary response to passing sensation." The former somewhat characterizes the velocity of meganet or social media, a "defensive response to the speed and shock of daily life in a modern society."⁶²

The velocity discussed above results in virality. A key feature of Facebook or any social media platform that renders virality possible is its feedback and engagement mechanisms. In the case of Facebook, aside from the comment option, it has its react (like, love, care, laugh, wow, sad, and angry) and share options. These options have allowed what was earlier identified by the NSC and the NTF-ELCAC as "policy feedback system" and "public engagement and policy support," respectively. The technical specificities of social media proved effective in realizing policy requirements which earlier technologies could hardly support. This is where an internet-enabled meganet qualitatively differs from the transistor-powered broadcast technologies of the past. The latter lacks what, for example, Facebook has as feedback and engagement mechanisms. Fuchs distinguished the particularity of social media by explaining how it has integrated tools that "support various forms of sociality into one platform," such as cognition,

⁵⁹ Cf. Auerbach, *Meganets*. Chapter 2.

⁶⁰ "Wild and Interesting Facebook Statistics and Facts (2023)," in *Kinsta* (28 December 2018), <<https://kinsta.com/blog/facebook-statistics>>.

⁶¹ Auerbach, *Meganets*. Chapter 2.

⁶² Feenberg, *The Ruthless Critique of Everything Existing*, 8.

communication, and co-operation.⁶³ The integration of these tools along with functionalities that allow a feedbacking loop and accessibility of smartphones have supported the possibility of the omnipresence of contents.

The table below summarizes the comparative quantitative data of two sets of NTF-ELCAC's Facebook posts. As of this writing, the NTF-ELCAC Facebook page has 194,000 followers.

Category	January 7, 2020, to June 30, 2021 (under the Duterte regime)	June 9, 2022, to February 28, 2023 (under the Marcos Jr. regime)
Total number of days	540	264
Total posts	422	685
Total reacts	652202	207244
Total shares	450721	93685
Total comments	52634	16720
Total number of engagements	1,155,557	317,649
Average posts per day	1	2
Distributed average engagements per day	1207 reacts, 834 shares, 97 comments	785 reacts, 354 shares, 63 comments
Distributed average engagements per post	1545 reacts, 1068 shares, 124 comments	302 reacts, 136 shares, 24 comments
Average engagements per day	2,140 or 1.1% of the 194,000 fans/followers	1,203 or .62% of the 194,000 fans/followers

The 540 and 264 Facebook posts of the respective sets of data garnered millions of engagements. And with the exponential manner on how content is distributed in Facebook, one could just imagine the extensive and massive reach of NTF-ELCAC's communication. According to the leading social media management platform Hootsuite, a Facebook post with more than 100,000 followers has an average engagement rate of .05%.⁶⁴ NTF-ELCAC's engagement in of .62% to 1.1% is already above average. What this means is a counterinsurgency agency shaping a counterinsurgency discourse with an unprecedented manner of distribution, feedback, and engagement. The meganet, with the dynamic interaction of powerful machines, "engaged actors,"⁶⁵ and persistent connectivity and contents, provides the conditions

⁶³ Christian Fuchs, "Social Media and the Public Sphere," in *TripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique. Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society*, 12, no. 1 (2014), 58.

⁶⁴ Christina Newberry, "42 Facebook Statistics Marketers Need to Know in 2023," in *Hootsuite.com* (17 January 2023), <<https://blog.hootsuite.com/facebook-statistics>>.

⁶⁵ A different study could be made to examine the authenticity of the accounts "engaging" NTF-ELCAC's posts.

for an omnipresent communication. The extensive, massive, and persistent reach of meganet-supported counterinsurgency discourse today makes terror-tagging and the anti-terror ideology omnipresent. Human rights organizations and civil society groups have observed how “widespread” the distribution of terror-tagging contents today are, compared in the past.⁶⁶ For example, the secretary general of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, Jonathan de Santos, has noted how the practice of terror-tagging has been “more common and because of social media more widespread under the Duterte administration.”⁶⁷ Terror-tagging and anti-terror ideology being widespread is not just because there are already too many communication devices accessible by the many but also because such devices have technical specifications that could render as omnipresent a propagandistic content generated and pushed primarily by the state. As elaborated earlier, these devices are specified to be constantly online and portable, networked to potentially unlimited nodes and databases, and designed with functionalities that invite engagements and feedback supportive of online virality. These combinations technically support the omnipresence of propagandistic contents including those pushed by the state.

A counterinsurgency program powered by an omnipresence of communication has serious implications to policymaking. It has exaggerated the issue of communist insurgency by constructing a terroristic image of it and extending its scope even among unarmed civilian activists. This analysis has been earlier confirmed by Hapal and Serfacica when they explained how NTF-ELCAC counterinsurgency discourse has lumped “activists with terrorists and turns the communist insurgency into a problem that’s bigger than what it actually is.”⁶⁸ In the guise of a counterinsurgency program, the fascist continuity could further policies deemed strategic to its counterinsurgency efforts and consolidating of its power at the same time.

⁶⁶ See Shawn Crispin, “‘Red-Tagging’ of Journalists Looms over Philippine Elections,” in *Committee to Protect Journalists* (5 May 2022), <<https://cpj.org/2022/05/red-tagging-of-journalists-looms-over-philippine-elections/>>; Imelda Deinla, “‘Red-Tagging’ and the Rule of Law in the Time of COVID-19,” in *Australian Institute of International Affairs* (1 April 2021), <<https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/red-tagging-and-the-rule-of-law-in-the-time-of-covid-19/>>; and Tanyalak Thongyoojaroen, “Red-Tagging in the Philippines: A License to Kill,” in *Human Rights Foundation* (10 April 2023), <<https://hrf.org/red-tagging-in-the-philippines-a-license-to-kill/>>.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Crispin, “‘Red-Tagging’ of Journalists Looms over Philippine Elections.”

⁶⁸ Hapal and Serfacica, “New War.”

Towards an Anti-Fascism beyond the Ecosystems of the Social Media

While an omnipresence of communication has allowed the NTF-ELCAC to exponentially distribute an anti-terror ideology strategic to the Duterte-Marcos fascist continuity, it does not however mean that 1) fascism emerges from online structures and 2) social media is technically determined to serve nefarious ends. First, in the case of the Philippines, digital fascism is only an aspect or a moment of the totality of Duterte-Marcos fascist continuity. Actively at play within and beyond the ecosystems of social media are real contradictions of opposing classes and forces and what Fuchs identified as a distinguishing mark of fascism—i.e., the institutionalization of a system of terror.⁶⁹ These serve as the material from which the Duterte-Marcos fascist continuity developed and consolidated. Institutions were organized, regulations were introduced, and terror was unleashed beyond social media, while instrumentalizing the latter to smoothen the viral distribution of a rationalizing and legitimizing anti-terror ideology. There is a dialectical interplay between the concrete and the online, with the former having a determinative role precisely because of its *intentions*. Williams elucidated this point when he argued that,

the notion of intention, restores the key question, or rather the key emphasis. For while it is true that any society is a complex whole of such practices, it is also true that any society has a specific organization, a specific structure, and that the principles of this organization and structure can be seen as directly related to certain social intentions, intentions by which we define the society, intentions which in all our experience have been the rule of a particular class.⁷⁰

In connection with this, the notion of intention rejects, or at the very least, challenges a determinist reading of social media which considers it as inherently beneficial to fascism. While there have been various cases where social media has enhanced the dynamics of democratic social movements, proving it as a terrain of contestation, one also needs to be wary of a

⁶⁹ Cf. Ligaya Lindio-McGovern, “Neoliberalism, Fascism, and People’s Resistance in the Philippines,” in *The Global Rise of Authoritarianism in the 21st Century: Crisis of Neoliberal Globalization and the Nationalist Response*, ed. by Berch Berberoglu (New York: Routledge, 2021); Mongaya, “Fascism, Fascisation, and Neoliberalism from Marcos to Duterte.”

⁷⁰ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2005), 36.

determinism that disempowers and disenfranchises human agency. On the one hand, it absolves the role of the state in organizing the very ideology, network, and actions of fascism—as the experience of the Philippines suggests. On the other hand, it blurs possible democratic interventions where social media could be made to serve democratic rather than fascist objectives. Scholars have provided workable suggestions to curb these dangers. For example, Fuchs proposed a “commons-based design principles and a commons-oriented society” to reorient the “sociality of society and the media.”⁷¹ Auerbach also suggested some concepts like “soft social control” to enhance discourse; a great slowing down—for example by limiting group sizes, disabling automatic links sharing beyond friends of friends, increasing heterogeneity to curb selective bias; a transparent and fair mechanism of turn taking where the biggest loudmouths are temporarily quieted and the softer-spoken participants are amplified; and many others like chaos injection, shaking up the data, and poisoning the well.⁷² In this way, the omnipresence of communication could be gradually made to serve initiatives that further informed engagement and democratic projects.

But beyond these technical fixes are the much needed socio-economic and political transformations. The corporate internet lacks the needed motives to address the problems of a commercially driven social media. Not until corporate internet consciously and earnestly addresses the issue of social inequality, it will never overcome its contradictions. Today’s inequalities, in the Philippines, as perhaps anywhere else in the world, is instigated by neoliberal capitalism. As Max Horkheimer declares, “whoever is not willing to talk about capitalism should also keep quiet about fascism.”⁷³ While fascism today takes on complex forms through its instrumentalization of social media, it still retains in its current form an invariant which makes it discernible and likewise engageable the way it was in its classical form. Fuchs has elaborated the direction towards the possible weakening of fascism. He argued that “only a society that strengthens equality and overcomes exploitation and domination can undermine the roots of fascism.” This means that, in the short term, “reforms that redistribute wealth and power coupled with the advancement of the general level of education and critique of and deconstruction of false news, post-truth culture, and ideology can help to weaken fascism and digital fascism”.⁷⁴ What is needed is an anti-fascism that goes beyond the ecosystems of the social media and confronts structural

⁷¹ Christian Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (London: Sage, 2013), 265.

⁷² Auerbach, *Meganets*, Chapter 8.

⁷³ Max Horkheimer, “The Jews and Europe,” in *The Frankfurt School on Religion: Key Writings by Major Thinkers*, ed. by Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Routledge, 2005), 226.

⁷⁴ Fuchs, *Digital Fascism*, 322.

injustices that have historically been the point where fascists manipulate their way to power.

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