

Neo-fascism as the Apparatus of Neoliberalism's Assault on Philippine Higher Education: Towards an Anti-Fascist Pedagogy

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Abstract: The neoliberal restructuring of the global economy as a response to the crisis of capitalist accumulation has led inevitably to the reform of higher education on the global scale. The neoliberal assaults on higher education pushed for vigorous marketization and corporatization of colleges and universities. In the Philippine context, the impact of neoliberal reform of education transpired primarily in the enactment of the K+12 reform. Such reform aligned Philippine basic education to the international division of labor. But under the Duterte regime, the neoliberal reform of the Philippine educational system coincided with the neo-fascist character of the state. It is the main thesis of this paper that the neo-fascist assault against higher education serves as a guarantee to push for unhampered neoliberal restructuring of Philippine education. In the face of this challenge, this paper will propose the development and practice of anti-fascist pedagogy among educators and education workers.

Keywords: neoliberalism, neo-fascism, critical pedagogy, corporatization

Technology-powered Neoliberal Restructuring of Education

Neoliberal economic order has been cascading around the world ever since the crisis of capitalist global accumulation in the seventies.¹ Neoliberalism is both a specifically economic process as well as a

¹ See Gerald Dumenil and Dominique Levy, *Capital Resurgent: Roots of Neoliberal Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

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broader reconfiguration of society.² In the first instance, it can be described as a political-economic doctrine arguing that social progress can be furthered most effectively by “liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.”³ Globally, it has restructured the educational systems around the globe for further capital accumulation.

Bonaventura de Sousa Santos points out that “[n]eoliberalism is the political form of globalization resulting from a U.S. type of capitalism, a type that bases competitiveness on technological innovation coupled with low levels of social protection.”⁴ With its drive to squeeze more profits from geographical areas not yet colonized by capital, the neoliberal economic order has given birth to the Fourth Industrial Revolution. According to Nancy Gleason:

The first industrial revolution emerged in the 1780s with steam power, making humans more productive. Then in the 1870s the second industrial revolution emerged with the development of mass production and electrical energy. The third industrial revolution emerged with the development of IT and electronics, which enabled more efficient production. We are now in a new phase where the fusion of several technologies is not only automating production, but also knowledge.⁵

The world today is riding the crest of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. It has also driven educational systems around the world to capitalize on this technology-driven revolution. Sadly, our nation still lags behind. While the Department of Education and Commission on Higher Education were proudly advertising—even before the pandemic came—that our educational system is as globally competitive in keeping up with the neoliberal restructuring of higher education worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic starkly exposed the impoverished condition of our educational system in the era of the 4IR. “The Philippines lags behind its peers in terms of affordability, availability and speed of internet access,” according to the

² See Noah De Lissovoy, *Education and Emancipation in the Neoliberal Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

³ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (New York: Polity Press, 1989), 2.

⁴ Quoted in Peter Mayo, *Hegemony and Education under Neoliberalism: Insights from Gramsci* (London: Routledge, 2015), 18.

⁵ Nancy W. Gleason, “Introduction,” in *Higher Education in The Era of The Fourth Industrial Revolution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1.

2017 National Broadband Plan of the Department of Information Communications and Technology (DICT), the latest uploaded on its website.⁶

But this Revolution is only made possible worldwide by the class struggle under the crisis-ridden monopoly capitalism.⁷ Technological innovations are mostly responses to the crisis of capitalist profit accumulation.⁸ But such a technological revolution is also a determinant of the restructuring of global capitalism. Technology-driven innovations allow corporate conglomerates to transfer their operation to the South for more profitability while maintaining their satellite operations in the North.⁹

The Disjunct between the Economy and Knowledge Production

The Philippine economy is primarily based on the export of labor power.¹⁰ The Philippines is the 4th largest remittance destination in the world with \$34 billion of inflows in 2018. In the study by the Asian Development Bank, “the Philippines received remittances roughly 12% of its gross domestic product in 2008. Remittances have become the single most important source of foreign exchange to the economy and a significant source of income for recipient families.¹¹ Because the country is dependent on imported capital goods and finished commodities, and production is oriented towards the export of cheap raw materials and low-value-added semi-processed goods, the Philippines suffers from a chronic trade deficit.¹² To compensate for this unsustainable economic foundation, the Philippines relies strongly on the export of labor power.¹³ Not surprisingly, during the “great lockdown” the economy contracted by 10% in the first three quarters of the year, worse than

⁶ See Anna Bueno and Jessamine Pacis, “As COVID-19 Forces Life to Move Online, Who Is Left Behind?” in *CNN Philippines* (20 May 2020), <<https://cnnphilippines.com/life/culture/2020/5/20/internet-access-pandemic.html>>.

⁷ See Christian Fuchs, “Critique of the Political Economy of Informational Capitalism and Social Media,” in *Critique, Social Media and the Information Society*, ed. by Christian Fuchs and Marisol Sandoval (London: Routledge, 2015).

⁸ See Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 160.

⁹ See Immanuel Ness, *Southern Insurgency: The Coming of The Global Working Class* (New York: Pluto Press, 2016).

¹⁰ See IBON Foundation, “IBON Praymer: Di Maubos-ubos na Sapin-saping Krisis” (Quezon City: IBON, 2021).

¹¹ See Ralf Rivas, “OFW Remittances Hit All-time High, but Families Still Run Out of Cash – Study,” in *Rappler* (16 December 2019), <<https://www.rappler.com/business/uniteller-study-ofw-remittances-hit-all-time-high-families-still-run-out-cash>>.

¹² IBON Foundation, “IBON Praymer.”

¹³ See E. San Juan, *Toward Filipino Self-determination: Beyond Transnational Globalization* (New York: State University of New York, 2009); Ligaya Lindio-McGovern, “Labor Export in the Context of Globalization: *The Experience of Filipino Domestic Workers in Rome*,” in *International Sociology*, 1, (2003).

the 7.3% contraction in 1984-85. This economic contraction only worsened the pre-existing economic crisis we had before the pandemic.¹⁴

The Great Lockdown and the Greater Digital Divide

Given the economic recession during the COVID-19 pandemic, the unequal access to technological resources also exacerbated the digital divide in distance education during the lockdown. According to Isy Faingold, chief of education at UNICEF Philippines, the lockdown and closure of schools that affected 28 million Filipino learners is bad news for a country where “there was an education crisis even before [the pandemic].”¹⁵ Surprisingly, in the 2021 budget, only P15 billion was allocated for the printing of learning modules for the distance learning system. But the think tank Institute for Leadership, Empowerment, and Democracy (iLEAD) estimated that about P67 billion is needed for the production of modules for over 20 million public school students this school year.¹⁶ This means our students and teachers will be relying more on online resources despite the digital divide. The government’s actual education budget in recent decades never reached 4% of the GDP, while the global standard is pegged at 6% of the GDP.¹⁷

Years before the pandemic, our educational system was restructured along the neoliberal orientation. The K+12 program enacted through Republic Act 10533, redirects the educational direction of the Philippine educational system towards the neoliberal agenda.¹⁸ In the deliberations in Congress with regard to the K to 12 program on October 17, 2012, the real agenda of the K+12 is all the more exposed: turn young Filipinos into workers for developed countries, instead of molding and training them to serve their country.¹⁹

The aim of education is less to train students to critically evaluate the government policies and actions but to confine learning to purely academic

¹⁴ See IBON Foundation, “IBON Prayer.”

¹⁵ Ana P. Santos, “In the Philippines, Distance Learning Reveals the Digital Divide,” in *Heinrich Boll Stiftung* (6 October 2020), <<https://eu.boell.org/en/2020/10/06/philippines-distance-learning-reveals-digital-divide>>.

¹⁶ See Bonz Magzambol, “Fast Facts: Deped’s Distance Learning,” in *Rappler* (1 June 2020), <<https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/things-to-know-department-education-distance-learning>>.

¹⁷ See Santos, “In the Philippines, Distance Learning Reveals the Digital Divide.”

¹⁸ See David Michael M. San Juan, “Neoliberal Restructuring of Education in the Philippines: Dependency, Labor, Privatization, Critical Pedagogy, and the K to 12 System,” in *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review*, 16:1 (2016).

¹⁹ See David Michael M. San Juan, “Nationalist Critique of the K to 12 (K+12/K-12): Program: Issues, Implications, and Alternatives” (unpublished paper, 2012); Arthur S. Abulencia, “The Unraveling of K-12 Program as an Education Reform in the Philippines,” in *South-East Asian Journal for Youth, Sports & Health Education*, 1 (October 2015).

excellence and compete with other privatized schools for branding.²⁰ Officially, every graduate of the K+12 program is supposed have:

1. Information, media, and technology skills,
2. Learning and innovation skills,
3. Effective communication skills, and
4. Life and career skills.

Omitted in these competencies are the social outcomes: to become critical citizens of our nation.²¹ For Neil Manaog, a public elementary school principal, K+12 “has been designed to align our country’s basic education curriculum to that of global standards, by adding two years of senior high school to the four-year secondary education and another year for mandated kindergarten.”²² More than providing longer education for Filipino youth, the K+12 program aims to prepare the youth for immediate employment upon graduation. This is consistent with the education of neoliberal subjects:

Human capital learning views students as self-interested entrepreneurs seeking to maximize fiscal return on their investment. From this perspective, a “quality” education provides students with the necessary skills and knowledge for economic success within the prevailing labour market. Educational goals are determined by labour market conditions and, as part of the naturalizing thrust of neo-liberal ideology, critical reflection on structural issues is correspondingly eliminated.²³

For Peter Kennedy, the “rationale for expanding post-compulsory education is defined increasingly in terms of its mediating role in harnessing social need to value production.”²⁴ In this situation, “students are not so much educated as caught within a discursive web ‘positioning’ them as future

²⁰ See Maria Teresa F. Calderon, “A Critique of K-12 Philippine Education System,” in *International Journal of Education and Research*, 2 (2014).

²¹ See “What Is K+12 Program?” in *The Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines*, <<https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/k-12/>>.

²² Neil Romano S. Manaog, “Notes on the K to 12 Curriculum,” in *The Manila Times* (30 January 2020), <<https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/01/30/campus-press/notes-on-the-k-to-12-curriculum/678242>>.

²³ Mery J. Hyslop-Margison and Alan M. Sears, *Neo-Liberalism, Globalization and Human Capital Learning: Reclaiming Education for Democratic Citizenship* (Netherlands: Springer, 2006), 3.

²⁴ Peter Kennedy, “The Knowledge Economy and Labour Power in Late Capitalism,” in *Critical Sociology*, 36 (2010), 834.

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employees or sellers of labour power.”²⁵ Subsequently, once graduates of K+12 education enter our universities, their basic education inculcated them the faith to become good and docile workers. They expect larger monetary returns in exchange for shorter education or much higher return for lengthier time spend in college. In a society of scarce resources and limited social mobility, education is often seen as the magic key to getting out of the vicious cycle of poverty.²⁶

Post-truth Society and Fragmentation of the Learning Self

These millennial students who are under the duress of K+12 education are products of the fourth Industrial Revolution.²⁷ They spend more time on the net; they subscribe to Spotify; they watch movies and series on Netflix; they do their own Vlogs and express their latest gigs on TikTok. They get their news through online sources and cable televisions. YouTube, Twitter, and other platforms are also the sources of their knowledge and current information.²⁸ These neoliberal platforms induce young people to make every aspect of their lives public.²⁹ These social network sites become the essential platform for shaping the identities of young Filipinos.³⁰

The *We Are Social* and *Hootsuite* released their annual digital report, which gives a global overview of the number of online users, social media users, the amount of time people spend online, and the most popular social apps people use. In the Philippines, time spent online daily soared from 9 hours and 29 minutes last year to 10 hours and 2 minutes this year, the highest in the world.³¹

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ See Masayoshi Okabe, “The K to 12 Program as a National HRD for the Workforce,” in *Philippine Journal of Labor and Industrial Relations*, 35 (2018).

²⁷ See Kaveri Subrahmanyam and David Šmahel, *Digital Youth: The Role of Media in Development* (New Zealand: Springer, 2010).

²⁸ See Gelzalis Duque, Diosah Nina San Antonio, and Leonora Brazil, “A Correlational Study on Social Media Involvement and Parental Relationship among Students of Asia Pacific College,” paper presented at the DLSU Research Congress 2017, De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines, 20 – 22 June 2017.

²⁹ See Henry A. Giroux, “Selfie Culture in the Age of Corporate and State Surveillance,” in *Third Text*, 29 (2015).

³⁰ Janette Hughes, Laura Morrison, and Stephanie Thompson, “Who Do You Think You Are? Examining the Off/Online Identities of Adolescents Using a Social Networking Site,” in *Social Media And Adolescence Connecting, Sharing And Empowering*, ed. by Michel Walrave, Koen Ponnet, Ellen Vanderhoven, Jacques Haers, and Barbara Segaert (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2016).

³¹ See Gelo Gonzales, “Filipinos Spend Most Time Online, on Social Media Worldwide – Report,” in *Rappler online news* (31 January 2019), <<https://www.rappler.com/technology/philippines-online-use-2019-hootsuite-we-are-social-report>>.

Even with one of the slowest internet speeds in the world, the Philippines tops the world, in so-called “knowledge society,” in terms of internet usage in front of a desktop or laptop computer, clocking in at 5 hours and 4 minutes daily, far from the global average of 3 hours and 28 minutes.³²

The advent of “knowledge society,” undermined and pluralized the sources of traditional authority.³³ Universities are no longer the only or even the dominant producers of knowledge. “What this adds up to,” according to Roland Barnett, “is an assault on the implicit right of the academic community to legislate over knowledge as such. In the knowledge society, knowledge legislators are everywhere. Under these circumstances, the question has to be asked: what, if anything, is special about academic knowledge?”³⁴ Experts and authorities today are in competition with knowledge claims sprawling on the worldwide web like Wikipedia and other free online sources.³⁵ As Marc Prensky poignantly observes, “the teachers are no longer the fountain of knowledge; the Internet is.”³⁶

Alarming, these “informal educational apparatuses,”³⁷ as Giroux calls them, are more and more hijacked by neo-fascist groups and individuals to spew conservative and militaristic ideologies extolling the silencing, if not the killings of critics of the government. Under such a situation, “[t]ruth is confused with opinions, and lies have become normalized at the highest level of government.”³⁸

Political ideologues and leaders have also hijacked the new social media to propagate their own image and subjective interpretations of reality like Donald Trump³⁹ and Ferdinand Marcos, Jr.⁴⁰ This is the “post-truth society” where feelings are more important than facts.⁴¹ “Truthiness” (the quality of stating concepts or facts one wishes or believes to be true, rather

³² See *Ibid.*

³³ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 4.

³⁴ Ronald Barnett, “Universities in a Fluid Age,” in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Education*, ed. by Randall Curren (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 563.

³⁵ See Thomas Leitch, *Wikipedia U: Knowledge, Authority, and Liberal Education in the Digital Age* (Maryland: John Hopkins University, 2014).

³⁶ Quoted and cited in Bryant Griffith, *NextGeners: Pedagogical Considerations* (London: Sense Publishers, 2016), 83.

³⁷ Henry A. Giroux, *The Public in Peril: Trump and the Menace of American Authoritarianism* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 88.

³⁸ Henry A. Giroux, *The Terror of the Unforeseen: Rethinking the Normalization of Fascism in the Post-Truth Era* (California: LA Review of Books, 2019), 12.

³⁹ See Darrell M. West, *Divided Politics, Divided Nation: Hyperconflict in Trump Era* (Washington, D. C. Brookings Institute, 2019).

⁴⁰ See Mu Sochua, “Disinformation Poses a Grave Threat to Democracy in the Philippines,” in *The Diplomat* (4 May 2022), <<https://thediplomat.com/2022/05/disinformation-poses-a-grave-threat-to-democracy-in-the-philippines/>>.

⁴¹ See Lee C. McIntyre, *Post-truth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018).

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than concepts or facts known to be true) of politicians and social media influencers have eclipsed truthfulness.⁴² As Giroux rightly observes:

Politicians endlessly lie knowing that the public is addicted to exhortation, emotional outbursts, and sensationalism, all of which mimics celebrity culture. Image selling now entails lying on principle, making it easier for politics to dissolve into entertainment, pathology, and a unique brand of criminality.⁴³

True enough, our people continue to be entertained by this political circus, especially by President Duterte. Our lawmakers made education free in our state colleges and universities, but there is also the proliferation of private takeover of schools. Such a takeover transformed education as public good to a private commodity. Students are no longer considered primarily as learners but as customers and clients with specific needs and demands.⁴⁴ State colleges and universities are forced to commercialize as state funds become scarce. With dwindling funds and budgets, the universities become obsessed with producing research outputs to justify more funding.⁴⁵

Surprisingly, the Media and Information Literacy fails to provide students the critical skills on how to analyze information and come up with their own conclusion. Sadly, exposure to a vast array of information, entertainment or otherwise, has not made our youth, the “digital natives,” more critical and deeply discerning about social and political issues. Being adept technologically does not translate naturally to criticality in the use of information, data, and technology itself to mine and synthesize these data for political ends.⁴⁶

Thus, in the DepEd Module on Media and Information Literacy for Grade 12 students, one of the guide questions reads: “If given the chance, will you join this rally? Why or why not?” The answer, as written in the module, was: “No, because the government has really doing their best for all the

⁴² See The neologism “truthiness” was coined by Stephen Colbert in his October 17, 2005, segment of “The Word” on *The Colbert Report* on the cable TV network Comedy Central. See Michael C. Munger, “Blogging and Political Information: Truth or Truthiness?” *Public Choice*, 134:1/2 (2008).

⁴³ Giroux, *Terror of the Unforeseen*, 115.

⁴⁴ Trevor Hussey and Patrick Smith, *The Trouble with Higher Education: A Critical Examination of Our Universities* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

⁴⁵ David L. Stocum, *Killing Public Higher Education: The Arms Race for Research Prestige* (Oxford: Academic Press, 2013); Simon Critchley, “What Is the Institutional Form of Thinking?” in *Derrida and the Future of the Liberal Arts: Professions of Faith*, ed. by Mary Caputi and Vincent J. Del Casino (London: Bloomsbury Studies in Continental Philosophy, 2013).

⁴⁶ Giroux, *Terror of the Unforeseen*, 116.

Filipino people and their constituents.”⁴⁷ (sic) This is simply “truthiness” in post-truth society, not being truthful, notwithstanding the syntactical error in the formulation of the statement itself.⁴⁸

Corporatized Humanities

This restructuring of media literacy is consistent with the corporatization of liberal arts education. Henry Steck defines the corporate university “as an institution that is characterized by processes, decisional criteria, expectations, organizational culture, and operating practices that are taken from, and have their origins in, the modern business corporation.”⁴⁹ Humanities and liberal arts education, in general, are geared towards preparing students how to be successful in climbing the corporate ladder. And climbing the corporate ladder entails peaceful détente in the workplace. For Giroux and Giroux, “corporate culture becomes an all-encompassing source of market identities, values, and practices. The good life, in this discourse, “is construed in terms of our identities as consumers— we are what we buy.”⁵⁰ And Jeffrey Di Leo explains the logic of this marketization of the ivory tower:

The paradigmatic neoliberal academic is a docile one. He is the product of an academic culture dominated by the recording and measurement of performance, rather than the pursuit of academic freedom or critical exchange— an academic climate that renders him risk averse and compliant. Neoliberal managerialism constructs and functions through manageable and accommodating subjects. These docile neoliberal subjects excel when they “follow the rules” regarding say “outcomes-based curricula” and the “culture of continuous improvement,” but risk failure when they begin to

⁴⁷ Llanesca T. Panti, “Blind Obedience Is Not Love of Country, CHR Says amid Deped Module Discouraging Protests,” in *GMA News Online* (16 October 2020), <<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/760215/blind-obedience-is-not-love-of-country-says-amid-deped-module-discouraging-protests/story/>>.

⁴⁸ Sharon Rider, “On Knowing How to Tell the Truth,” in *Post-Truth, Fake News: Viral Modernity and Higher Education*, ed. by Michael A. Peters, Sharon Rider, Mats Hyvönen, and Tina Besley (Singapore: Springer, 2007).

⁴⁹ Henry Steck, “Corporatization of the University: Seeking Conceptual Clarity,” in *Annals of the American Academy of Social and Political Science*, 585 (2003), 75.

⁵⁰ Henry A. Giroux and Susan Searls Giroux, *Take Back Higher Education: Race, Youth, and the Crisis of Democracy in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 252.

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question the neoliberal academic practices to which they are subjected.⁵¹

In the neo-liberal fantasy of individualism, everyone is supposed to be an entrepreneur, retraining, and repackaging himself or herself in a dynamic economy, perpetually alert to the latter's technological revolutions. In this sense, neoliberal restructuring of education has replaced pedagogical language with the language of the market and corporate management. Literate graduates are turned "illiterate":

Illiteracy has become a political weapon and form of political repression that works to render critical agency inoperable and restages power as a mode of domination. Illiteracy serves to depoliticize people because it becomes difficult for individuals to develop informed judgments, analyze complex relationships, and draw upon a range of sources to understand how power works and how they might be able to shape the forces that bear down on their lives. Illiteracy provides the foundation for being governed rather than how to govern.⁵²

Erosion of Criticality under the Neoliberal Restructuring of Schooling

The dwindling of liberal arts education in higher education has been further reinforced by the reduction in courses that constitute the General Education Program of universities and colleges. In response to the K+12 restructuring of basic education, the liberal arts component of higher learning education has been watered down. Further, the enactment of CHED Memo No. 20, Series of 2013 which has trimmed down the college General Education Curriculum (GEC), and eventually cascaded subjects from college to senior high school, has led to the removal of vital subjects such as Filipino, Literature, and Philippine Government and Constitution at the tertiary level.⁵³ Since 2014, many educators and organizations have advocated for the

⁵¹ Jeffrey R. Di Leo, *Higher Education under Late Capitalism: Identity, Conduct, and the Neoliberal Condition* (New York: Macmillan Palgrave, 2017), ix.

⁵² Henry A. Giroux, "Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference," in *College Literature*, 19 (1992), 5.

⁵³ See Noel Christian A. Moratilla, "Revisiting Paulo: Critical Pedagogy and Testimonial Narratives as Liberative Spaces in the Philippines' K-12 Curriculum," in *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 17 (2019).

return of Philippine History to high school. This was brought about by Department of Education (DepEd) Order 20, 2014 which effectively removed Philippine History as a dedicated course in high school. Such removal further erodes the analytic skills of students in deciphering the historical ramifications of the current national issues like Marcos martial law and the EDSA Uprising.⁵⁴

The erosion of liberal arts came from critics who want to reduce it to mere appendage in the production of happy workers:

Over the last several years, however, we have seen a new sort of criticism directed at the academy. These contemporary critics no longer claim to be in search of “true liberal learning,” but instead they call for an education that simply equips people to play an appropriate role in the economy. Education, from this perspective, is something you purchase; it should be thought of either as an investment or as an “experience” you pay someone else to provide you.⁵⁵

Liberal arts education is supposed to create spaces of learning where students can voice out their ideas without the fear of political repression. In this way, spaces of learning enabled under liberal arts education train students how to argue, assess arguments, and counter arguments. Contrary to the fear that such relentless questioning of everything may lead to cynicism or unprincipled skepticism, it must be remembered that in this situation students also begin to make their own minds, and create their own points of view.⁵⁶ And these points of view are sometimes parallel to groups existing in campus or outside society and so students join these organizations freely. As Di Leo expresses it well:

The freedom to question and to explore subjects wherever they may lead is the heart of a healthy academy—and the soul of academic freedom. The reinforcement of faculty and student subjectivities that are passive, docile, compliant, and submissive may be

⁵⁴ See Jamaica D. Ignacio, “[Opinion] The Slow Death of Philippine History in High School, *Rappler* (26 October 2019), <<https://www.rappler.com/moveph/243058-opinion-slow-death-philippine-history-high-school/>>.

⁵⁵ Michael S. Roth, *Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2014), 107.

⁵⁶ See Harold T. Shapiro, *A Larger Sense of Purpose: Higher Education and Society* (New Jersey: Princeton University, 2005).

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suitable for vocational training centers—which seem to be the telos of neoliberal academe—but are not acceptable in a vision of higher education wherein dialogue and critique are championed. The ability to challenge authority and to think critically about all aspects of society and culture, including academic culture, is absolutely necessary for higher education to flourish—without this ability, higher education flounders.⁵⁷

However, liberal arts education does not only teach students how to earn and make a living or become professionals. In its classical sense, it teaches students how to live the good life.⁵⁸ And living is not just living alone as a hermit or an atom but one's self-making occurs in the polis or community. It is democratizing. For as Wendy Brown points out, "extending such an education to the masses draws a utopian vision in which freedom from toil is generalized and political rule is widely shared."⁵⁹ Hence liberal arts education is a civic education in action. Or, in the words of Giroux and Giroux, "Critical citizens aren't born, they're made, and unless citizens are critically educated and well-informed, democracy is doomed to failure."⁶⁰

Nevertheless, in its classic formulation, and defended by traditionalists, liberal arts can display a conservative bias since it has the tendency to emphasize the teaching of the liberation of the mind for its own sake.⁶¹ Consequently, while it rejects the neoliberal attempt to reformulate the aim of education along the utilitarian line, this objective which is commendable in itself, is not sufficient to form engaged citizens. Neither is it powerful enough to thwart the marketization and commercialization of education. The corporate takeover of the universities will only weaken further the classical definition of liberal arts education. In such corporatized pedagogical spaces, the utopian thinking to create a better or alternative future is eclipsed by the market imperative to hone one's skills to be saleable in the labor market.⁶²

⁵⁷ Di Leo, *Higher Education under Late Capitalism*, x.

⁵⁸Edward G. Ballard, *Philosophy and the Liberal Arts* (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989); Alexander S. Rosenthal-Pubul, *The Theoretic Life - A Classical Ideal and Its Modern Fate: Reflections on the Liberal Arts* (Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2018).

⁵⁹ Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2015), 188.

⁶⁰ Giroux and Searls Giroux, *Take Back Higher Education*, 257.

⁶¹ See Rosenthal-Pubul, *The Theoretic Life*.

⁶² See Jakob Claus, Thomas Meckel, and Farina Pätz, "The New Spirit of Capitalism in European Liberal Arts programs," in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 50 (2018).

Neoliberal Fascism: Smuggling Back the State from the Backdoor

Paradoxically, the neoliberal ideology that seeks to minimize state intervention in the operation of the market utilizes the state to achieve this end. The merging of neoliberal ethos and fascist outlook is not a contradiction. As Noah Lissovoy points out, “neoliberalism unites an individualist ethos (that obscures the unequal positions of differently raced and classed actors) with an authoritarian and bellicose political culture.”⁶³ In short, the strong arm of the state does the disciplinary work that capital requires. And neoliberal economics achieves this through neo-fascist ideology.

I use the term fascism which is quite controversial and a hotly contested concept today among social scientists. But I follow the lead of Roger Griffin who employs the Weberian notion of ideal type to avoid an absolutist definition of fascism. The most telling symptom of fascist politics is social division. It aims to separate a population into an “us” and a “them.” A second generic component of fascism is its foundations in irrational drives. As Griffin states, “Despite rationalizations of the fascist world-view by appeals to historical, cultural, religious or scientific ‘facts,’ its affective power is rooted in irrational drives and mythical assumptions.”⁶⁴ This explains the rabidity of many supporters of the current administration who see in Duterte a mythic father-authority figure who can finally save Philippine society from further deterioration. Neo-fascism is rooted in the regenerative mythic narrative which asserts that things will be reborn, and all past sins will be excised through mass mobilization. Today, neo-fascism creates not just a cult of the leader, just like in classical European fascism, but also the worship of the market.⁶⁵

Second is the creation of a mythic past that distorts the present and rewrites the past so that those who disapprove of their revisions are attacked viciously like in the case of universities and progressive scholars. Academics who defend “truthfulness” in history are red-tagged and vilified as communists. Thus, Enzo Traverso is right when he writes, “anti-communism characterized fascism from the beginning to the end of its historical trajectory. It was a militant, radical, aggressive anti-communism that transformed the nationalist ‘civil religion’ into a ‘crusade’ against the enemy.”⁶⁶ And for Jason Stanley, “eventually, with these techniques, fascist politics creates a state of

⁶³ De Lissovoy, *Education and Emancipation*, 56.

⁶⁴ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 15.

⁶⁵ See John Bellamy Foster, “Neofascism in the White House,” in *Monthly Review* (1 April 2017), <[Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.https://monthlyreview.org/2017/04/01/neofascism-in-the-white-house/](https://monthlyreview.org/2017/04/01/neofascism-in-the-white-house/)>.

⁶⁶ Enzo Traverso, *The New Faces of Fascism* (London: Verso, 2019).

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unreality, in which conspiracy theories and fake news replace reasoned debate.”⁶⁷

Henry Giroux, writing about Trump’s neo-fascism, summarizes Paxton’s classic study of fascism by enumerating its characteristics:

an open assault on democracy, the call for a strongman, a contempt for human weakness, an obsession with hypermasculinity, an aggressive militarism, an appeal to national greatness, a disdain for the feminine, an investment in the language of cultural decline, the disparaging of human rights, the suppression of dissent, a propensity for violence, disdain for intellectuals, a hatred of reason, and fantasies of racial superiority and eliminationist policies aimed at social cleansing.⁶⁸

In the Philippine context, these characteristics, while may not necessarily apply fully, are reflected in the political leadership style of President Duterte.⁶⁹ We have an authoritarian President that is part of the global trend towards the rise of the far Right and the populist authoritarianism. Fascism today might not look exactly as it did in the Marcos era (1965-1986), but the same repressive conditions are present, such as, the rule of the military, the strong anti-communist drive of the state, mass killings, arrests, human rights violations, and selective martial law, the passage of Anti-terrorism Law, and repression of press freedom.⁷⁰

In the Philippine context, the communists are considered the outsiders, the “terrorists,” who obstruct the progress and development of the nation. Fascism is not the problem, rather, the threat of the obsolete ideology of communism is. Lumped with the “communists” are all individuals and groups who dream of an alternative future beyond the current system. The fascist arm of the state reaches out to the “ivory tower” through red-tagging and surveillance of progressive organizations.⁷¹ The unilateral abrogation of

⁶⁷ Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works* (New York: Random House, 2018).

⁶⁸ Giroux, *Terror of the Unforeseen*, 68.

⁶⁹ Walden Bello, “Neoliberalism, Contentious Politics, and the Rise of Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia,” 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); Jose Maria Sison, “Struggle against Fascism Continues,” in *Upsurge of People’s Resistance in the Philippines and the World: Selected Works 2020* (Utrecht: International Network for Philippine Studies, 2021).

⁷⁰ See Sison, “Struggle against Fascism Continues.”

⁷¹ Rappler, “Top Universities Denounce Red-Tagging Of Schools,” in *Rappler* (24 January 2021), <<https://www.rappler.com/nation/top-philippine-universities-denounce-red-tagging-schools>>.

the University of the Philippines and the Department of National Defense Accord of 1989 is a case in point.⁷²

Various forms of fascist movements are woven together by the anti-communist drive. Authoritarian leaders today are not tyrants. Tyrants are hated by people. Neo-fascists try to win over people through the control of media and information and dissemination of fake news.⁷³

Teaching to Defy towards Anti-fascist Education

How does a university education provide alternative ways of envisioning different forms of life to create an imagined future without violence and oppression in such corporatized and hypermilitarized spaces? Giroux answers rather poignantly, "One of the challenges facing the current generation of educators, students, and others is the need to address the question of what education should accomplish in a society at a historical moment when it is about to slip into the dark night of authoritarianism."⁷⁴ Considering that liberal arts education is necessary but not sufficient to create critical and engaged citizens, we have to turn to the social reconstructionist movement in education to find a complementary position yet advance beyond the orthodox liberal arts philosophy.⁷⁵ With profit motive as the overriding concern of neoliberal education, defending education as a public good is bound to fail. This is all truer if we accept the fact that even liberal arts education has been used to enhance the neoliberal curriculum.⁷⁶ Under the shadow of neoliberal ideology, "the student is educated and subjectivized for a job market that demands flexibility, creativity, autonomy and responsibility as well as a specific personality and the desire for self-fulfillment."⁷⁷ In some instances, criticality is equated with constant

⁷² See CNN Philippines Staff, "UP Accord Terminated to Protect Filipinos vs 'Enemies of the State' – Lorenzana," in *CNN Philippines* (19 January 2021) <<https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2021/1/19/UP-DND-accord-police-military-Duterte-red-tag.html?fbclid=IwAR06EKG8IKDv4l4NTO1B7IsttoggFvuEkOfnPTsdHDlnVE8cvy3B-w5EqDg>>.

⁷³ See Madeleine Albright, *Fascism: A Warning* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2018).

⁷⁴ Giroux, *Terror of the Unforeseen*, 120.

⁷⁵ See Susan Roberts and Darrol Bussler, eds., *Introducing Educational Reconstruction: The Philosophy and Practice of Transforming Society through Education* (San Francisco: Caddo Gap Press, 2010).

⁷⁶ See Insung Jung, Sarah Sanderson, and Jennifer Christine C. Fajardo, "The Core Curriculum: An Analysis of Liberal Arts Colleges in Asia, North America, and Europe," in *Doing Liberal Arts Education: The Global Case Studies*, ed. by Mikiko Nishimura and Toshiaki Sasao (Singapore: Springer, 2019).

⁷⁷ Claus, Meckel, and Pätz, "The New Spirit of Capitalism," 7.

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questioning without the benefits of being anchored on certain social vision of an alternative society.

To give a radical twist to liberal arts education, its Deweyan intent should be fused with the social reconstructionist sensibilities elaborated by George Counts. Liberal arts as an anti-fascist pedagogical tool, following George Counts' explosive pamphlet in 1932, embraces full indoctrination and partisanship that are inimical to dominant university ethos of liberalism. Indoctrination of course is inimical to liberal arts education but is unavoidable according to Counts. Neither can we argue for universal neutrality and objectivity. In a situation where the market stomps everything, where the political system controls and regulates all areas of our lives, neutrality is dangerous. As Counts argues,

If Progressive education is to be truly progressive, it must emancipate itself from the influence of this class, face squarely and courageously every social issue, come to grips with life in all of its stark reality, establish an organic relation with the community, develop a realistic and comprehensive theory of welfare, fashion a compelling and challenging vision of human destiny, and become less frightened that it is today of the bogies of imposition and indoctrination.⁷⁸

Liberal education must be tempered with the social reconstructionist philosophy of education that sees education as a tool for social transformation. As a tool for social transformation, education is necessarily situated in history. It must provide powerful criticisms of banking education while providing reasoned alternatives to the received wisdom of the past. It is the only way to neutralize the proclivity of neoliberalism to reduce all social problems, especially educational crises, to individual responsibility. This means the university should encourage the organizing of students and faculty for unions and social civic organizations to provide alternative visions of the future. In this sense, education is necessarily partisan. As Giroux points out, "liberal educators committed to simply raising questions have no language for linking learning to forms of public scholarship that would enable students to consider the important relationship between democratic public life and education, politics and learning."⁷⁹

⁷⁸ George S. Counts, *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press), 7.

⁷⁹ Henry A. Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 169.

Universities must practice community engagement in order to become socially relevant.⁸⁰ Because it is a way to expand the horizon of public spaces especially when universities are the only places where the right to dissent is still preserved while contested. As Badiou argues, what we need are “intellectuals who can have [a] significant and organic link with the ordinary masses to arouse them, educate them in a mutual situation of dialogical pedagogy.”⁸¹ And Peter McLaren suggests:

Revolutionary critical pedagogy questions the official, hegemonic view of ahistorical educational change, isolated from the capitalist social and productive relationships. As revolutionary critical educators, we need to understand how the dynamics of the capitalist system—its movement from global capitalism to transnational capital, for instance—has guided the meaning and purpose of educational reform and has impacted institutions and approaches with respect to what counts as educational change.⁸²

Towards an Anti-fascist Citizenship Education

The purpose of university education is to prepare the young to become engaged citizens who will fully participate critically in democratic processes.⁸³ In this way, education cannot escape inculcating to learner citizens the values antithetical to fascism and authoritarianism. Education for democratic citizenship necessarily involves the development of the agency of individuals, that is to say, their ability to be actors in the political sphere, to be active rather than passive.⁸⁴ Our aim must be to help students grow in intellect and character so that they are well able to engage in the most serious issues we face as men and women and as citizens: What is the best way of life? What is the best political regime? Anti-fascist pedagogy openly challenges the authoritarian claim of neoliberal reason to dictate and impose its ethos among academics and the rest of society. Universities do not just

⁸⁰ See Tara Fenwick, “Futures for Community Engagement: A Sociomaterial Perspective,” in *Thinking about Higher Education*, ed. by Paul Gibbs and Ronald Barnett (Switzerland: Springer Cham, 2014).

⁸¹ Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 60.

⁸² Peter McLaren, “Radical Negativity: Music Education for Social Justice,” in *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*, 10:1 (2011), 186.

⁸³ See Shapiro, *A Larger Sense of Purpose*, 89.

⁸⁴ Gert J.J. Biesta, *Learning Democracy in School and Society: Education, Lifelong Learning, and the Politics of Citizenship* (London: Sense Publishers, 2011).

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teach socially just pedagogy but pedagogy of justice.⁸⁵ It does not entail of course wholesale acceptance of the “indoctrination” that Counts mentioned. It simply means that indoctrination or the imposition and transmission of values and knowledge is an unavoidable process in education. But the question is: are these values and knowledge imposed by force so that learners accept them without question, or do the learners embrace them through self-reflection and public argumentation?

Our schools today have given too much emphasis on outputs, on quantitative measurement, preparation for careers, money, and return on investments.⁸⁶ Our students today invest in education because they want to be on top of the ladder, while others would want to use their careers to pull their families out of the quagmire of economic deprivation.⁸⁷ And so, our educational institutions are dead serious about inculcating skills necessary for our youth to become productive workers.⁸⁸ We confuse job training and university education. If there is a perfect example of indoctrination, it is this kind of accepted university training that we have right now.

Education is of course not a simple detachment from the world and a pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. A liberal arts education is necessary if we want the youth not only to become proficient and happy workers. They need to be engaged with their work equipped with concepts of human dignity and workers’ rights.⁸⁹ Above all, they will also have to be engaged with social activities. For most of the things we do in our work, as Ivan Illich argued a long time ago, are not learned in schools. Learning and knowledge acquisition should also be enriched by teachers by joining unions and bringing their students to neighborhood associations, so they make use of their liberal arts training to help people better and improve society.⁹⁰ Anti-fascist citizenship education moves away from defining citizenship as the end product of education. Such instrumentalist citizenship education neglects the fact that young people are already enmeshed in a struggle for building

⁸⁵ See Elizabeth Birr Moje, “Developing Socially Just Subject-Matter Instruction: A Review of The Literature on Disciplinary Literacy Teaching,” in *Review of Research in Education*, 31:1 (2007).

⁸⁶ See Ed Villegas, “Neoliberalism and the Rise of Consumerist Education,” in *Mula Tore Tungo Palengke: Neoliberal Education in the Philippines*, ed. by Bievenido Lumbera, Ramon Guillermo, and Arnold Alamon (Quezon City: IBON Foundation, 2007).

⁸⁷ See Jennifer del Rosario-Malonzo, “Economics of Philippine Education: Serving the Global Market,” in *Mula Tore Tungo Palengke: Neoliberal Education in the Philippines*, ed. by Bievenido Lumbera, Ramon Guillermo, and Arnold Alamon (Quezon City: IBON Foundation, 2007).

⁸⁸ See D. San Juan, “Neoliberal Restructuring of Education in the Philippines.”

⁸⁹ See Henry A. Giroux, “Liberal Arts, Public Philosophy, and the Politics of Civic Courage,” *Curriculum Inquiry*, 17 (1987).

⁹⁰ See Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York Harper, 1973).

democratic institutions.⁹¹ Pursuing knowledge collectively to transform the existing state of affairs, in contrast to the mere pursuit of one's illusive dream of success, debating difficult and controversial social issues wherever it may lead us, will threaten those who want to maintain the social order.

Today, Giroux asks the educators, "[i]n a world in which there is an increasing abandonment of egalitarian and democratic impulses, what will it take to educate young people and the broader polity to challenge authority hold power accountable?"⁹² In our case, in a society where people are shocked by the vulgar language of an authoritarian President, where people are silenced through militaristic clampdown, how do we teach our young people to become critically-minded? "Critical" here means not only using skills to assess arguments but exploring alternative democratic lifestyles and ways of life. Today, electronic-mediated learning technologies have replaced the fire and passion to learn. We believe that new technologies are ends themselves rather than as means to learn more and learn how to learn.

How do we arrest the growing "illiteracy" in the midst of technological adeptness? What can we do to challenge the reduction of social problems to individual responsibility and psychological resiliency? Giroux provides interesting answers on what anti-fascist pedagogy would look like:

Pedagogy is a mode of critical intervention, one that endows teachers with a responsibility to prepare students not merely for jobs but for being in the world in ways that allow them to influence the larger political, ideological, and economic forces that bear down on their lives. Schooling is an eminently political and moral practice because it is directive of and also actively legitimates what counts as knowledge, sanctions particular values, and constructs particular forms of agency.⁹³

In the wake of the weakening of authority in the neoliberal era of capitalism, the state bureaucrats and chief media influencers have gone berserk in attacking students and academics who criticize the government. Attacking what they see as the "culture of complaint," they warn sternly young people just to be dutiful citizens and mind their own private education. But Zygmunt Bauman is right in reminding us, "if there is no room

⁹¹ See Biesta, *Learning Democracy in School and Society*.

⁹² Henry A. Giroux, "Authoritarianism and the Challenge of Higher Education in the Age of Trump," in *Action, Theory, and Criticism for Music Education*, 18:1 (2019), 3.

⁹³ Henry A. Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Heymarket, 2014), 53.

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for the idea of a wrong society, there is hardly much chance for the idea of a good society to be born, let alone make waves.”⁹⁴

Education has a significant role to play in combating the spread of anti-scientific consciousness during the pandemic, dispelling the mythical consciousness that idolizes neo-fascist political leaders and their enablers among social media influencers. It has a major role to play in creating a community of critical inquirers that expose the dumbing influence of trolling on social media. Pedagogical practices that go beyond the classroom debates aim at weaponizing the minds of students and arming them with ammunitions on how to detect and demolish idolatrous worship of state-manufactured fake truths in the public sphere. Schools have become the targets of orchestrated fascist assaults because the government suspects communists have infiltrated the spaces of universities and colleges including high schools. The state repressive forces suspect that communists are sowing seeds of discord and providing alternative truths that undermine state-created falsehoods.

We must build a radical culture in schools that would be hostile to the development of fascist thought and neoliberal culture of fragmentation. The capacity to challenge authority comes from academic subjects that are active and engaged. The docility of the neoliberal academic subject has at its source an authoritarian ideology that is the scourge of both the liberal arts in particular and the academy in general.⁹⁵ We have to train students who are not adaptive to the system but maladjusted to the current norms, such as extrajudicial killings (EJK), human rights violations, etc.⁹⁶ It is not just teaching students but allowing them to engage in the here-and-now in creating viable institutions to defend our democratic institutions against authoritarianism. The role of university education is not to sanctify or consecrate the ~~powers-that-be~~ but to interrogate them and expose their precarious foundations. What we need is to promote a culture of questioning. And while this culture of questioning is under siege from neo-fascist bureaucrats and neoliberal prophets, Ramin Farahmandpur reminds us that “its message only becomes more urgent and important in these troubled and dangerous times.”⁹⁷ Critical pedagogy today finds its strongest expression in anti-fascist education.

⁹⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Society under Siege* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 170.

⁹⁵ See Di Leo, *Higher Education under Late Capitalism*.

⁹⁶ See Peter McLaren and Ramin Farahmandpur, *Teaching against Global Capitalism and the New Imperialism: A Critical Pedagogy* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 317.

⁹⁷ Ramin Farahmandpur, “A Critical Pedagogy of Hope in Times of Despair: Teaching against Global Capitalism and the New Imperialism,” in *Social Change*, 36 (2006), 90.

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