

NEW FORMS OF FASCISM

Roland Theuas DS. Pada
University of Santo Tomas, Philippines

This paper covers the idea of fascism in the light of new and emerging technologies as well as the current ubiquity of its use. I draw my inspiration for this paper from the constant use of the word "fascist" to denote opposition to a group or personal stance on socio-political issues. My attempt to look at new forms of fascism is guided by the original concept of fascism espoused by Mussolini's Doctrine of Fascism. I also attempt to frame the conditions of the new forms of fascism in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This context undergirds the current propaganda model of media institutions that have shifted their operations to the Internet. I argue in this paper that current media platforms that operate under the BUMMER principle provide a potent breeding pool for new forms of fascism that are reliant on ideologies as opposed to authoritarian figures. These conditions, as I argue in this paper, force us to rethink our current entanglement with democratic systems that are entrenched in representative iterations. As a conclusion to this paper, I argue the strong need for exploring an increased degree of participation of individuals through direct forms of democracy, increased scrutiny of media institutions, and the exploration of current and existing technologies to undergird direct democratic participation.

Keywords: Authoritarianism, BUMMER, The Fourth Industrial Revolution, New forms of fascism

INTRODUCTION

The ubiquity of the word "fascism" has gathered a certain degree of resonance in campaigns ranging from political conflicts to issues of racial discrimination. A typical unpacking of the concept of fascism itself has proven difficult, and the task is rife with perils such as drawing the ire of a certain group or marginalizing the cause of other identities. As much as I do not have a horse in the race for any causes or political brands to endorse my paper inspects how contemporary social practices generate these fasces or bundles to the point of critical mass. With this intention in mind, I would like to direct the discussion to the original *Doctrine of Fascism* as it was conceived by Giovanni Gentile and Benito Mussolini (1933). Fascism is the conception of a "group-first" or "nation-first" ideology that tries to transcend the political limitations of socialism and capitalism. While the Gentilian-Mussolinian conception of fascism is

critical of liberalism, socialism, and democracy, it remains surprisingly open to these ideologies if the emphasis on collectivism is preserved. Mussolini (1933, 20) writes:

Given that the nineteenth century was the century of Socialism, Liberalism, and Democracy, it does not necessarily follow that the twentieth century must also be a century of Socialism, Liberalism and Democracy: political doctrines pass, but humanity remains; and it may rather be expected that this will be a century of authority, a century of the Left, a century of Fascism. For if the nineteenth century was a century of individualism (Liberalism always signifying individualism), it may be expected that this will be a century of collectivism, and hence the century of the State. It is a perfectly logical deduction that a new doctrine can utilize all the still vital elements of previous doctrines.

What I find fascinating here is that there is a fundamental effort in the doctrine that resonates with other ideologies. While this is not my resounding praise or recommendation of the practice of fascism, it does present a clearer picture of how we can understand fascism beyond the usual scope of authoritarianism, racism, and bizarre cults of personalities. Moreover, Gentilian-Mussolinian fascism presents certain qualities that are manifested in contemporary "fascies" or groups. What is important in this original use of the word fascism is the emphasis on the "group" and "action." The main difference between Gentilian-Mussolinian fascism and contemporary manifestations of fascism is that the figure of authority is no longer necessary to bind the *fascies* together. One can imagine, in this case, a Milgram experiment (1963) without the man in the lab coat insisting on the continuance of the experiment or a Stanford Prison (2007) experiment without a warden.

The key ingredient in this contemporary form of fascism is the emergence of new and unrealized consequences of technologies in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The general ubiquity and necessity of technologies, ranging from devices that are constantly connected to the internet to social networks that are managed by an efficient algorithm. These technologies create a fertile ground for cultivating *fascies* without resorting to authority figures to control or dictate the goal or objective of the group. While an authority or a figurehead might be involved in this process, they are no longer necessary for the organization of the groups or *fascies*. The way that these groups or *fascies* are organized is completely autonomous; they are neither coerced nor forced to congregate into an ideological singularity. Through social networks, this behavior is amplified and encouraged by automated algorithms whose designed purpose is to maximize user engagement and maximize advertising exposure. The effect of these automated systems is divisive. Following basic behavioral principles, users will be encouraged to avoid negative engagements with other users and seek positive and affirmative engagements with like-minded users, which generates a tribal effect. Parties or *fascies* are encouraged to band together and engage their enemies to advance their cause. This provides plenty of opportunities for social networks to monetize this behavior by encouraging conflict and maximizing user engagement. Engagement will, in turn, generate more income for the social network through advertising and, at the

same time, fulfill the needs of its users to reinforce their tribal affinity and combat fend off their enemies.

Certain nuances are omitted in this simplification of contemporary fascies. This I intend to cover in the succeeding sections of this paper. To further elaborate on the contemporary form of fascism, I will divide my discussion into three sections. The first section of my paper will be devoted to the discussion of fascism in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. In this section, I will discuss the technological, political, and economic underpinning of fascism that is enabled by the protected status of private institutions and disempowered government institutions. I also include a discussion of anomie that guides the behavior of private institutions involved in social networks. The second section of my paper will cover issues involving the automation of *fascies*, how automated systems can curate ideological/tribal groups, and how algorithms react to the interests and engagements of their users. The third section of this paper will involve some of the nuances that revolve around the curation of *fascies*, such as the utilization of artificial users and bots to influence the trajectories of automated systems and the homogenization of choices in these social networks. I conclude the paper by revisiting Honneth's six conditions of social integration in *Freedom's Right* (2014) and that is "The members of society who supplement each other in their communicative exchange of views must feel that the products of their will formation are effective enough to be practiced in social reality" (Honneth 2014, 304).

FASCISM AND THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Unpacking the idea of fascism as an ideology is rife with hermeneutic issues and contextual nuances. There is always a strong connotation that fascism ought to be connected to an authoritarian or dictatorial figure that buttresses an entire fascist movement. While this tendency is usually attributed to the aftermath of the Second World War with figures such as Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, there is very little to gain in understanding the contemporary workings of fascism if it merely focuses on an authoritarian or dictator paradigm. By retaining the connotation that fascist movements are entirely dependent on the figurehead represented by the authority or the dictator, it is possible to lose track of the mechanisms of fascist movements and their ever-growing implementation in various societies.

For us to deal with this issue, we need to look back to Mussolini's *The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism* (1933) since the concept itself was his invention. We have to remember that Mussolini's foundational doctrine of fascism is neither fixated on a political stance (liberal, right, left, socialism, capitalism, etc.) nor is it concerned with class struggles or class conflict; instead, it insists that:

Fascism desires the State to be a strong and organic body, at the same time reposing upon broad and popular support. The Fascist State has drawn into itself even the economic activities of the nation, and, through the corporative social and educational institutions created by it, its influence reaches every aspect of the national life and includes, framed in their respective organizations, all the political, economic and

spiritual forces of the nation. A State which reposes upon the support of individuals who recognize its authority, are continually conscious of its power, and are ready at once to serve it, is not the old tyrannical State of the medieval lord nor has it anything in common with the absolute governments either before or after 1789 (Mussolini 1933, 24).

On a related note, fascism for Mussolini (1933, 16) is against the subjugation of the individual to the state, which ironically is a very constructive criticism of contemporary democracies:

Fascism denies, in democracy, the absurd conventional untruth of political equality dressed out in the garb of collective irresponsibility and the myth of "happiness" and indefinite progress. But, if democracy may be conceived in diverse forms – that is to say, taking democracy to mean a state of society in which the populace is not reduced to impotence in the State – Fascism may write itself down as "an organized, centralized and authoritative democracy."

Mussolini (1933, 21), however, is consistent with his insistence on the authority of the state since it represents the interest of the people:

The foundation of fascism is the conception of the State, its character, its duty, and its aim. Fascism conceives of the State as an absolute, in comparison with which all individuals or groups are relative, only to be conceived of in their relation to the state.

Although Mussolini does not mention Hobbes, there is a strong affinity between the doctrine of fascism to the representation of the will of the people in the *Leviathan* (Hobbes 1996). Two elements can be derived from this affinity, the first one being that there is a strong claim that the will of individuals is amplified through the state or its *Leviathanesque* figure.¹ The second affinity is that the impetus to empower and give rise to authority is derived from the longing of the people for a revolution for Mussolini (1933, 23), while for Hobbes (1996, 144), it is to fight off a common enemy.

A key element in the development of fascism as an ideology is its commitment to action for a certain cause. This active element, combined with the unity espoused by the group, collective, or state, is the strength of fascism for its cause. With the growing historical suspicion of authoritarian figures, there has been a growing emphasis on reducing the power of the state or its associated authority figures. The wide historical adoption of democratic forms of government has reduced the possibilities of an authoritarian regime continuing its hold on power in most contemporary democracies. While authoritarian regimes continue to exist, they are mostly isolated cases that are rapidly swaying to the advantages of democracy. The measures adopted by most democratic regimes usually come in the form of limiting the terms of the power of its leader, limiting the duration of leadership, and the option of allowing its constituents to legally depose their leader. This can be observed in John

Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (2003), where the dissolution of the commonwealth is seen as a necessary product of the dissolution of society and also of the government (Locke 2003, 194). Locke includes many circumstances in which a commonwealth is dissolved, specifically in the abuse of power by its leaders, such as the disruption of the legislature and electoral fraud (Locke 2003, 195), neglect of duty to maintain peace and order (Locke 2003, 196), and the necessity for establishing a new government or commonwealth (Locke 2003, 197). These principles had become a fundamental guide to most democracies insofar as they limit the degree and extent of power in rulers. Much of these limitations revolve around the figure of leadership and limit the scope of fascism by restricting the persistence of a possible authoritarian figure. While this might generally reduce authoritarian power within the state, it does not preclude the dismantling of ideological persistence that led to the use of authoritarianism. In other words, if our understanding of fascism is limited to the scope of authoritarian figures, the actual scope of fascism is taken out of the optics of critical discourse.

New forms of fascism emerge from this limited scope of critical discourse when authoritarian figures are always at the center of critique. Much like how we lose track of small and insignificant details of history in exchange for monolithic figures, our perception of fascism is likewise reduced to the myopia of a figure-centric critic. An authoritarian figure can be deposed, ousted, and subject to a revolt, but this does not necessarily dismantle the ideological fuel that drove groups to band together and elevate such a figure into a position of power. The power of an authoritarian figure lies in their capacity to utilize ideological principles that rouse the group or the fasces to a certain cause. The authoritarian figure is merely an instrumental knot that binds individuals into fasces; they can be sacrificed for the cause, they can be ousted by the opposition as a martyr for the fasces, and they can be discarded if the fasces requires a new figurehead to further entangle individuals to the cause. Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford's sociological study on *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) provides some early glimpses into the nature of fascism in its new forms by investigating the sociological traits of potential fasces. Through their study of respondents, Adorno's team (1950, 2) attempted to find traits and characteristics that may create fascistic tendencies due to ideological tendencies. The context of their study, however, has to be understood in the prevailing post-war discourse on anti-semitism and racial prejudice. The irony of Adorno's attempt to understand prejudice in this regard involves creating typologies and generalizations about individual subjects based on their ideological tendencies. Adorno argues that the typological nature of their study is somewhat justified by the necessity of providing "weapons" to counter the "potential threat of the fascist mentality" (Adorno et al. 1950, 748).

While I think there are some lapses and anachronisms in Adorno's study that might not be ethically accepted in the current times, there are certain aspects of the study that point us in the correct direction of understanding fascism. Individual characteristics, as Adorno (1950, 747) would say, are confusingly diverse. Any ideological tendencies or psychological traits can lead to authoritarian tendencies (be it in support or as the authority) as long as there is resistance to ideological scrutiny and critique. The persistence of an unassailable ideology is a hallmark of a fascistic tendency. The belief and the blind faith towards the correctness and validity of an

ideology is the knot that binds the fasces together. An unassailable ideology provides a stable platform for individuals to form fasces and impose their will on other individuals. For this reason, I think that characterology and typologies are bound to fail to identify the traits of fascistic tendencies in individuals since there is a diversity of traits that can be linked to fascism. Ideologies provide justification and motivation for individuals to act as a unified 'bundle' to pursue a cause or a purpose. Be it a justification for expanding the Spanish territories in the age of exploration or holy war against the Muslims in the Crusades, the justification of a cause that binds individuals together is a product of an unassailable ideological reification. Lest we begin accusing individuals who pursue animal rights and practice vegetarianism as a fascistic character, Adorno's typology should be abandoned to understand new and emerging forms of fascism.

The resistance to dialectical engagement that leads to a critique of ideology is fundamental to the bundling of fasces. When individuals find kinship for a cause and find no resistance to their ideological motives, the possibility of fascism emerges. While the obvious solution to this fundamental tendency of fascism is a dialectic of ideologies, the irony is that the current condition of communication seems to amplify fascistic tendencies. With the proliferation of the internet, the hopeful expectation that we have of dialectical engagements of ideologies. However, despite the ubiquity and availability of the internet, the resistance against critique and the tendency to bundle fasces has become more prevalent. With the growing necessity of connectedness through the internet, the fourth industrial revolution has amplified the effect of ideological reification by automating the categorization of individuals into arbitrary groups for the sake of advertising and data harvesting.

The necessity of connectivity is part of the condition of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Schwab (2016, 78) argues that with the connectivity offered by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the demand for realizing aspirations in life and the strong tug of the labor market require individuals to adapt to an on-demand economy. Moreover, Schwab (2016, 38) emphasizes that "Human needs and desires are infinite, so the process of supplying them should also be infinite," meaning that despite the very disruptive nature of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, there is an alluring possibility of growth in these disruptions. In other words, the disruptive nature of technological changes, coupled with the increasing demand for automation to increase efficiency, would inevitably force individuals to conform to the platforms that connect them to like-minded people who may not necessarily offer a dialectical challenge for their well-entrenched ideologies. With the strong demand for efficiency and a highly reactive market that kowtows to disruptive demands that are necessitated by an epoch governed by trends and fashionable ideologies. Honneth (2014, 301) notes that in contrast to traditional media, the internet's offer of freedom is a double-edged sword:

Ideally, when we read a newspaper still committed to its task of informing the public, or when we watch a politically informative television program, the spectrum of presented opinions should ensure that our judgments are tested in terms of their universalizability, and thus only flow into the process of will-formation in this rationally cleansed form.

By contrast, in the internet forums of the *World Wide Web*, where rather diffuse publics tend to lack even the most rudimentary controls on rationality – not only because it is possible to cease communication at any time, but also because the anonymous interlocutors need not necessarily respond. Certainly, this is less true of the highly-specialized web communities in which the required expertise and the necessary commitment help establish comparable rational constraints, but it is all the more true for the overflowing internet communities that know no such access restrictions and in which the most absurd positions can circulate without comment. In these places, will-formation is not only amorphous and free from any pressures of rational justification, but it also offers space for all sorts of apocryphal and anti-democratic opinions and movements.

The growing connectivity between individuals in the ubiquitous nature of the internet does not necessarily translate into the proliferation of a democratically open and rational venue for discourse. The allure of options and autonomy only translates to further obscurity and inaccessibility. As opposed to the earlier practices of network connectivity through privately operated BBS (Bulletin Board System) and privately maintained internet forums, contemporary platforms for discourse are mainly operated through platforms that rely on advertisement revenue and business models that thrive on mandatory data-harvesting. While user-maintained forums on the internet still exist to this day, they do not have the similar reach and necessity of use offered by pervasive platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The loss of stake on the level of the individual users, therefore, leads to the massive adoption of these communicative platforms, which inevitably leads to users accepting the arbitrary policies, restrictions, and lockouts from these platforms. The video streaming site YouTube, for example, controls a massive amount of content where users are funneled to watch their algorithm-based recommendations while content creators are forced to comply with arbitrary policies on what kind of content to publish. In Paul Lewis's Article in *The Guardian* (2018), The ex-Google software engineer, Guillaume Chaslot, developed software that scrutinizes the favourability of YouTube's algorithm to certain content and found out that the Clinton-Trump campaign in the 2016 US elections was heavily favoring Trump's campaign (2018). Whether this favorable algorithm for the Trump campaign is a good or a bad outcome is something that is up for the reader to decide. What is apparent, however, is the massive influence that a ubiquitous platform such as YouTube has over ideological discourse and the possibility of critique.

The need for efficiency and profitability drives the internet to seek unified platforms where users are profiled, categorized, and consolidated in their respective demographic. Lanier (2010, 10) notes that this tendency is a product of standardization in computing systems that creates a 'lock-in' phenomenon. The lock-in phenomenon is a product of highly efficient and industry-adopted systems that are ubiquitous and necessary in the operation of these systems. Much like the MIDI standard in music digitalization or the wide adoption of UNIX-based computing systems, Lanier (2010, 12) fears how human expression can be inevitably "ingrained into the interlocked

software designs of the internet." Lanier, in *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts* (2018, 56), further remarks that the divisive nature of algorithms in social media platforms has created "filter bubbles" that categorize them for prolonged engagements on these platforms. The general thrust of Lanier's arguments in this book is to argue that social media platforms use the "BUMMER" model. BUMMER is Lanier's acronym for "Behaviors of Users Modified and Made into an Empire for Rent" (2018, 24). This acronym depicts current and prevalent social media platforms that are engaged in behavioral modifications of their users to entice prolonged engagement for advertisement and data harvesting purposes. It manipulates its users to become constantly engaged in the platform to allow advertising and, at the same time, gather personal information to target its users. BUMMER platforms are, therefore, able to use user-generated content and, at the same time, gather information from its users for targeted advertising.

This condition is exploited by the BUMMER systems since it provides immediate feedback to the user to provide the illusion of communicative exchange. With the condition of social media platforms where users can be faked and the perusal of communication is minimal, the proliferation of fasces occurs at a very rapid pace. While the responsibility of allowing these group mentalities to thrive lies with the social media platforms, the possibility of this continued proliferation lies with the users themselves. As long as users continue to provide BUMMER platforms with content, the system will continue to thrive and sell out to interested parties for the right price. With the homogeneity of content and an occasional tension or drama from other users with different opinions, BUMMER platforms can constantly tweak user engagement to proliferate advertisements and collect data from its users.

For example, in the Cambridge-Analytica scandal from Facebook, Isaak and Hanna (2018, 56) raised ethical issues and questions about user privacy when Facebook granted access to more than 87 million users worth of personal information. Combined with the optimization of advertisements, personalization of user experiences through algorithms, and the ubiquity of internet access through IoT (Internet of Things) (Isaak and Hanna 2018, 57), users are constantly bombarded with customized content that is tailored to their personal preferences. The danger with this kind of unfettered access to similarly-minded user-generated content is that it amplifies already-existing biases, ideologies, and in some cases, prejudice. This kind of user engagement is also rife with influence from parties that have access to greater funding sources that can extend the reach of their content to targeted audiences that are receptive to political parties or institutions. At the onset, it seems that there is a pathway for a democratic and critical discourse since anyone can proliferate and participate in a discourse where ideologies are scrutinized and subject to critique. In practice, however, the disparity in resources would still mean that wealthier organizations and institutions will still overpower individuals in terms of the production of content, advertising reach, and infrastructure.

We are reminded by Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent* (1988) that the existence of elite domination of media allows powerful organizations and institutions to filter which kind of information is worthy of proliferation (1988, 2). Moreover, Chomsky (1988, 9). also notes that media companies are likewise influenced by the pressures of shareholders and funders that want to increase profitability. With the

emergence of the internet as a new venue for various forms of media, the demands of maintaining an infrastructure for communications remain. While maintaining radio and television stations, manufacturing of media through different technologies, and the logistics of distributing printed materials were costs attributed to traditional forms of media; the internet is likewise maintained by necessary operational resources. A website requires the necessary hardware and software to remain connected to the internet, technical personnel to maintain and operate the site, and people that would maintain relevancy in a constantly connected world. While connecting to the internet might seem affordable or accessible to most people, maintaining its constant function is complicated and expensive. In the same manner, despite all the shift of venue for media companies, Chomsky's (1988, 14) observation still holds for the internet: "The advertiser's choices influence media prosperity and survival."

The growth of the Internet generally depended on the constant allure of advertising opportunities to institutions and organizations. Advertising allowed the internet to thrive by providing incentives to content creators, site owners, and internet-related infrastructures to grow with the advertising demands. Companies like Google has evolved from search engine provider for Internet users to massive advertising platform that incentivizes content creation as a venue for advertising. Lanier notes that this growth in advertising eventually led to practicing content matching, which categorized users into a locked-in system, much like how MIDI can standardize the representation of notes in the computing world (2010, 13). This ability to categorize and standardize a method of profiling representations of users is made very apparent in the change of name by Facebook to Meta. Not only does the word 'Meta' represent an all-encompassing platform for the internet, but it also represents the product that Meta delivers to its business stakeholders: metadata gathered from its users.

FASCES AND IDEOLOGY: A CASE OF REIFICATION

With the increasing growth of monolithic social media providers on the internet, the wide adoption and ubiquity of these platforms, and the necessity of adopting constant connectivity with the internet, the possibility of critical discourse has become a breeding pool for fascistic practices. In BUMMER platforms, like-minded users are grouped via algorithm and are constantly reinforced to interact in their respective echo chambers. The blind faith towards ideologies espoused in these echo chambers creates a breeding ground for new forms of fascism, fascism without an authoritarian figure. While authoritarian figures are initially useful for fabricating an ideology, proliferation of ideology, and the implementation of ideology, however, if the ideological faith of the individuals in the fasces is already established, the figure is no longer necessary to the cause of the fasces. Ideologies can bind people together, and in some cases, the knot that holds them together is tight enough to maintain the strength of the fasces without a leader. The fascination and alacrity of a vigil that is usually employed for potential authoritarian figures are often confused with a knot that binds the fasces together. The leader of the authoritarian figure is simply a stick in the bundle; if one is pulled out of the bundle, another can always step in and fortify the group. The knot

that I speak of is ideology, and it has taken a more persistent form with the conditions of social interactions that we have at the moment.

For the sake of clarity, it would be necessary to define what kind of form fascism has in these contemporary conditions. I like to take the liberty to define fascism as an ideologically-driven group that seeks normativity without recourse to dialectical intervention and critique. No longer should the idea of fascism revolve around an authoritarian figure since the fabrication, proliferation, and implementation of ideologies can function without an authoritarian figure. For example, Neo-Nazism does not need Adolf Hitler to constantly guide them or reinforce and mobilize the fasces into action. Nick Ryan, in an article in *The Independent* (1998), covers the story of the group Combat 18,² for example, is a contemporary Neo-Nazi group that was formed by the British National Party as a response to anti-fascist groups. Fasces such as Combat 18, serves as an example that ideological fixation can give rise to new forms of fascism. Nazism and even Neo-Nazism are not strictly the only avenues for these new forms of fascism. Fascism can take many forms, including movements against fascism that can have fascistic tendencies to force the normativity of their ideologies without recourse to discourse or dialectical engagement. Denton, in his review of *Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook* and *From Fascism to Populism in History* (2021), states that ANTIFA and Black Lives Matter movement is "...not a movement to trifle with. They are organized internationally and will not hesitate to use violence to achieve their ends" (Denton 2021, 205). It should be noted that new forms of fascism are no longer confined to either Nazism or anti-Semitism; its expansive properties can affect all forms of ideologies that are given a protected status due to their cause. A quality that should also be understood is that ideological imperviousness is a proper indication of the rise of new forms of fascism. If an ideology cannot be assailed or is given protected status, then it can lead to blind faith and obedience by those who are locked-in to its cause. These types of ideological causes can have an effect on the future possibilities of discourse. Lamentably, new forms of fascism can forcibly implement normative values without recourse to critical dialectical discourse to justify any normative claim. Be it a fight for a specific brand of democracy, the forcible implementation of renewable energy in developing countries, or the use of a specific currency for a necessary global resource, new forms of fascism can emerge from any ideology that is not subject to critique. The true essence of a democratic civilization lies in its capacity to provide avenues where an ideology could be proven wrong or subject to revision. If an ideology is excluded from scrutiny, critique, and discourse, then fascism will thrive without opposition. Even for the cause of order, prosperity, and peace, the freedom to subject ideologies to critique is the only guarantee that an ideology is truly worth pursuing. The compliance to an ideology should be freely and rationally assented by individuals; otherwise, the ideology, in practice, is merely a fascistic order that thrives on threats, violence, and moral decrepitude.

CONCLUSIONS: A RECOURSE TO A POSSIBILITY OF DEMOCRACY

If there is a possibility of a future where democracy is protected, and fascism is thwarted, then we should remain vigilant about the possibility of monolithic

ideological forms of reification. With the new forms of fascism that we encounter in the contemporary forms of social interaction on the internet, there should be growing concern about how democratic discourses should be implemented on prevailing ideologies. A healthy democratic system should enable its populace to provide individual voices for concerns that encompass its citizens. The irony of the technological developments in the Fourth Industrial Revolution is that there seems to be no clear attempt at revisiting the viability of representative democracies. The indirect form of democratic participation in representative democracies means that individuals are only able to address their concerns through a proxy figure. If technologies exist that can connect people through computer networks, then the justification for the continued use of representative democracy somehow becomes moot. Since we live in a time where internet connectivity has become a necessity, there would be very few excuses left for democratic nations to ignore direct forms of democracy.

The questionable viability of representative democracies has to be addressed when we look at the massive infrastructure capabilities of media organizations on the internet. These media organizations have the capacity to consolidate and concentrate influence on specific individuals or organizations. With the disparity of resources between wealthy and powerful organizations, monological ideologies can remain unchecked and unassailable. Chomsky's propaganda model of mass media reminds us that these strategies and operative functions of manufacturing consent are still used by powerful organizations despite the typical promises of connected and free-flowing modes of communication on the Internet. While this paint a very bleak *Black Mirror-esque* dystopian future for democracy, we must be aware that there have been plenty of technological developments in the last decade that offer solutions to the growth of new forms of fascism. For example, while blockchain technologies have offered alternative currencies that are maintained and validated by their users, the same kind of technology can be employed to allow individual citizens to participate directly in democratic systems. Elections can be run entirely on a peer-to-peer validation of votes through this technology. Government records can be maintained over this technology with fewer risks of manipulation, redaction, and deletion from influential organizations. Again, if it is possible to demand internet connectivity to individuals as an economic necessity, I think that it would be likewise a possibility to demand this technology to individuals as a necessity for participating in democratic processes.

The constant preoccupation of critics with the idea of authoritarianism must be addressed to offer a counter-balance for the new forms of fascism. Instead of focusing on individual figures, critics should begin to look at the ideological foundations of these figures. Moreover, critics should consider that these figures are fungible resources that are employed as mere figureheads for ideological causes that benefit interested parties. Similar conditions from Chomsky's propaganda model and even Lippmann's *Public Opinion* (1998, 248) from 1922 assert that consent from democratic systems is subject to fabrications from external forces. If anything, increased scrutiny should be placed upon media institutions because of their capacity to manufacture consent in representative democracies. Like any business institution, media companies are wholly dependent on the necessary economic resources required for their operation and maintenance. With the constant dependency on economic

resources, these media institutions are susceptible to political and economic influences from interested parties or organizations.

I offered in this essay the possible solutions that are within the reach of our current technological state. In order to counteract the growth of the new forms of fascism, there should be strong actual democratic participation from individuals within a democratic society. This participation should no longer be limited by mere representations from political figures since the current technological advances have made it possible to further exploit the manufacture of consent through controlled and targeted propaganda campaigns. The use of blockchain technology offers a workable alternative to representative democracies by allowing individuals to participate directly in decision-making processes and discourse. With the ubiquity of connectivity to the internet as an economic necessity, I have argued that this necessity should also apply to the demands of democracy in the form of direct participation. Through direct participation, ideologies can be scrutinized and subject to critical discourse, reducing the possibility of a protected and unassailable ideological foundation for the new forms of fascism. My last proposal to staunch the growth of the new forms of fascism is a renewed and increased scrutiny of media institutions as the propaganda engine of the new forms of fascism. The change in technological trends did not necessarily translate to the increased growth of democracy. On the contrary, it has increased the powerful reach of media institutions that Lippmann and Chomsky have foretold. Media institutions are the death knell of the future of democratic societies because of their capacity to consolidate power through the protection and proliferation of ideologies. When we begin to realize how the current democratic processes in representative democracies are subject to the manipulations of media institutions, then we can begin considering the possibility of direct democracy as the future of democratic societies.

NOTES

1. In the case of Hobbes, the sovereign or the eponymous *Leviathan* (1996) becomes the manifestation of the will of the individual and therefore surrenders any right to self-governance (1996, 114).

2. The name is derived from the letters A (1) and H (8), referring to Adolf Hitler. (BBC, 2020)

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