

What is Digital Fascism?

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Abstract: *This book has addressed the question: How is fascism communicated on the Internet? This article offers an explicit definition of digital fascism rooted in its theoretical foundations and case studies of the transmission of fascist thought and politics on-line. NOTE: this article is a republication of Christian Fuchs' concluding chapter to Digital Fascism. Media, Communication and Society Volume Four, Routledge (2022).*

What is fascism?

A critical theory of fascism must ask itself in what relationship fascism stands to capitalism. Classical Marxist definitions of fascism often characterised fascism as a particular type and stage of capitalist development. Let us have a look at two examples.

Georgi Dimitrov, who was the Communist International's general secretary from 1935 until 1943, defines fascism as "the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital."¹ Dimitrov sees the fusion of finance capital, terrorism, dictatorship, and imperialist warfare as characteristic of fascism.

Leon Trotsky gave a comparable definition: "fascism is nothing else but capitalist reaction; [...] The historic function of fascism is to smash the working class, destroy its organizations, and stifle political liberties when the capitalists find themselves unable to govern and dominate with the help of democratic machinery."² "The mission of fascism is not so much to complete the destruction of bourgeois democracy as to crush the first outlines of proletarian democracy."³ For Trotsky, fascism is just like for Dimitrov the most reactionary form of capitalism that uses terror for destroying socialist organisations and their struggle for socialism.

Such definitions ignore the important role that nationalism and exterminatory racism and xenophobia have historically played in fascism. For example, in the case of Nazi-fascism such approaches understand anti-Semitism as "peripheral, rather than as a central moment."⁴ They also overlook that fascism often contains particular forms of one-sided anti-capitalism such as the hatred of finance capital because it is seen as being Jewish in character. For example, Hitler did not see an antagonism between capital and labour, but between "Jewish finance-capital" on

the one side and German labour and German capital on the other side, which is why he spoke of the “exexploitation of German labor power in the yoke of world Jewish finance”⁵ via financial mechanisms such as loans. Hitler’s propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels⁶ argued that the Jew is “the creator and bearer of international stock-market-capitalism, the main enemy of German liberty”. Hitler⁷ wrote that the “fight against international finance and loan capital has become the most important point in the program of the German nation’s fight for its independence and freedom”. “The Left once made the mistake of thinking that it had the monopoly on anti-capitalism or, conversely, that all forms of anti-capitalism are, at least potentially, progressive.”⁸

By breaking interest-slavery we mean the elimination of the tyrannical money-power of the stock market in the state and economy, which exploits the productive Volk, making them morally contaminated and incapable of national thinking. The Nazis wanted to advance “breaking interest-slavery” (*Brechung der Zinsknechtschaft*), a political demand that goes back to and that Hitler took up from the fascist economist Gottfried Federer who also wrote the Nazi Party’s programme. By breaking interest-slavery, the Nazis understand “the elimination of the tyrannical money-power of the stock market in the state and economy, which exploits the productive Volk, making them morally contaminated and incapable of national thinking.”⁹ The whole concept is based on the assumption that there is a “sharp separation of the stock exchange capital from the national economy.”¹⁰

The Nazis saw finance capital as parasitic and Jewish and industrial capital as productive and German. They propagated a simplistic and one-dimensional form of anti-capitalism that moralises, dualises and personalises capital (good German industrial capital VS. evil Jewish finance capital). Finance capital is biologised as being Jewish and opposed to a fictive national interest of German capital and German labour.

Moishe Postone points out in this context:

“This form of ‘anti-capitalism’, then, is based on a on the abstract. The abstract and concrete are not seen as antinomy where the real overcoming of the abstract – of the value dimension – involves the historical overcoming of the a well as each of its terms. Instead there is the one-sided attack on abstract Reason, abstract law or, on another level, money and finance capital. [...] The manifest abstract dimension is also biologized – as the Jews. The opposition of the concrete material and the abstract becomes the racial opposition of the Arians and the Jews. Modern anti-Semitism involves a biologization of capitalism – which itself is only understood in terms of its manifest abstract dimension – as International Jewry”¹¹

Orthodox Marxist definitions of fascism have overlooked the importance of nationalism and racism as ideological dimensions of fascism. In contrast, an opposite extreme are liberal definitions of fascism that ignore capitalism or deny a relation between capitalism and fascism. Let us have a look at some of these definitions.

The historian Roger Griffin established a widely cited and used definition of fascism:

“Used generically, fascism is a term for a singularly protean genus of modern politics inspired by the conviction that a process of total political, social and cultural rebirth (palingenesis) has become essential to bring to an end a protracted period of DECADENCE, and expressing itself ideologically in revolutionary and forms of deeply antiliberal and mythically charged NATIONALISM (ultranationalism) which may often embrace overt notions of racial superiority”¹²

For Griffin, nationalism, racism, and anti-liberalism are the three key features of fascism. There are no aspects of terror, militarism, patriarchy, authoritarian leadership, and capitalism in this definition. The historian Stanley G. Payne approves of Griffin's definition and defines fascism as “a form of revolutionary ultranationalism for national rebirth that is based on a primarily vitalist philosophy, is structured on extreme elitism, mass mobilization, and the Führerprinzip, positively values violence as end as well as means and tends to normalize war and/or the military virtues.”¹³ Payne sees nationalism, authoritarian leadership, and violence as features of fascism. Such a definition does not allow a distinction between fascism and Stalinism.

The historian Walter Laqueur sees nationalism, hierarchy, the leadership principle, and violence as key features of fascism: “a ‘fascist minimum’ such as the common belief in nationalism, hierarchical structures, and the ‘leader principle’. All fascisms were antiliberal and anti-Marxist, but they were also anticonservative, inasmuch as they did not want to submit to the old establishment but to replace it with a new elite. Fascism rested on the existence of a state party and, to varying degrees, on a monopoly over propaganda and the threat and use of violence against opponents. Such a ‘fascist minimum’ is far from perfect, but it is sufficient for most purposes.”¹⁴ Also in Laqueur's definition, the relationship of capitalism and fascism remains unclear.

The political theorist Roger Eatwell defines minimum features of fascism. This is what he calls the fascist minimum. Fascism is an

“ideology that strives to forge social rebirth based on a holistic-national radical Third Way, though in practice fascism has tended to stress style, especially action and the charismatic leader, more than detailed programme, and to engage in a Manichaeian demonisation of its enemies. [...] Nationalism: The belief that the world is divided into nations is central to fascism [...] Holism: Fascism is based on a view that the collective predominates over individual rights and interests. This helps to explain its hostility to liberal democracy. However, the principle also has an individual aspect in the sense that it portrays man as a victim of alienation, divided from other members of the true community and as incapable of finding fulfilment within existing socioeconomic structures. [...] Radicalism: [...] Fascism involves the desire to create a new political culture, partly through mobilisation and sometimes through cathartic violence. Although the idea of rebirth figures prominently in propaganda, there is no reactionary or populist desire to return to a former

society or mythical past (though there is a desire to preserve aspects of the past). Fascism is an alternative form of modernity, though it synthesises the optimism of most modernists with the pessimism of conservatism. The Third Way: Fascism is hostile to both capitalism and socialism, but draws on aspects of both. It sees capitalism as too individualistic, too dominated by the short run and ultimately not loyal to the community. It sees socialism as too internationalist and based on false views of equality. [...] It syncretically seeks to draw on what is seen as the best of capitalism (the naturalness of private property, its dynamism) and socialism (its concern for the community and welfare)."¹⁵

For Eatwell, the key features of fascism are nationalism, charismatic leadership, collectivism, violence, anti-liberalism, and a self-understanding that propagates a Third Way beyond both capitalism and socialism. It remains unclear what the relationship is between capitalist society and fascism. The problem of liberal definitions of fascism is that by ignoring the relationship of fascism and capitalism they cannot explain why fascist movements exist in capitalist societies and do not “explain why fascist movements, however great their rhetorical anti-conservatism, always relied on conservative forces to gain support and aim at power – never on those of the left.”¹⁶ Both the reduction of fascism to capitalism and the ignorance of capitalism in definitions of fascism are inadequate. A critical theory of fascism should neither underestimate nor totalise capitalism as explanatory feature and characteristic of fascism.

The historian Ian Kershaw, author of a widely-read biography of Hitler, gives an enumerative characterisation of fascism.¹⁷ According to Kershaw, important features of fascism include hyper-nationalism, racism, authoritarian leadership, the friend/enemy-scheme (anti-Marxism, anti-socialism, anti-liberalism, anti-democratic, patriarchal values, militarism, violence and terrorist extermination of identified enemies. Other than authors such as Griffin, Payne, Laqueur, or Eatwell, Ian Kershaw provides some indications about the relationship of fascism and capitalism without reducing the one to the other.

“hyper-nationalist emphasis on the unity of an integral nation, which gained its very identity through the ‘cleansing’ of all those deemed not to belong – foreigners, ethnic minorities, ‘undesirables’; racial exclusiveness (though not necessarily biological racism like Nazism’s variety) expressed through insistence on the ‘special’, ‘unique’ and ‘superior’ quality of the nation; radical, extreme and violent commitment to the utter destruction of political enemies – Marxists quite especially, but also liberals, democrats and ‘reactionaries’; stress upon discipline, ‘manliness’ and militarism (usually involving paramilitary organizations); and belief in authoritarian leadership. Other features were important, indeed sometimes central, to the ideology of a specific movement, but not omnipresent. Some movements directed their nationalism towards irredentist or imperialist goals, with devastating effect, but not all were intrinsically expansionist. Some, though not all, had a strong anti-capitalist tendency. Often, though not invariably, they favoured reorganizing the economy along ‘corporatist’ lines, abolishing independent trade unions

and regulating economic policy by 'corporations' of interests directed by the state. This amalgam of ideas, with varying emphasis, was generally consonant with the aim of establishing mass support for an authoritarian regime of an essentially reactionary, non-revolutionary kind. Some of the radical Right movements, those that were avowedly fascist, went further. They wanted more than just to overthrow or dismantle the existing state and replace it with a nationalist, authoritarian government. They sought total commitment to the collective will of a united nation. They demanded soul as well as body. They looked to create a 'new man' (the language was invariably macho), a new society, a national utopia. This total claim, more than anything else, was ultimately what made fascism revolutionary and distinguished it from related parts of the Right that were authoritarian and nationalist but looked essentially to conserve the existing social order. Fascism sought a revolution not in terms of social class, as Marxists advocated, but a revolution nonetheless – a revolution of mentalities, values and will. [...] Whether the shift was to the conservative or to the radical Right, it was advertised as essential to protect and regenerate the nation. As class conflict intensified – now no longer primarily economic but overtly political and ideological in nature – national unity was advanced as the essential bulwark to the threat of socialism. [...] Fascism's message of national renewal, powerfully linking fear and hope, was diverse enough to be capable of crossing social boundaries. Its message enveloped an appeal to the material vested interests of quite disparate social groups in a miasma of emotive rhetoric about the future of the nation. It touched the interests of those who felt threatened by the forces of modernizing social change. It mobilized those who believed they had something to lose – status, property, power, cultural tradition – through the presumed menace of internal enemies, and especially through the advance of socialism and its revolutionary promise of social revolution. However, it bound up these interests in a vision of a new society that would reward the strong, the fit, the meritorious – the deserving (in their own eyes)."¹⁸

Kershaw argues that fascism tries to mobilise those who fear they might lose status, property, power, or culture through the promise of a revolution. Fascism arises in the context of crises of capitalist society. It presents itself as a solution to such crises. The solution it poses does however not want to overcome class society, but rather constructs socialism as one of the enemies of the nation. Kershaw does not explicitly stress the ideological dimension of fascism, namely that it distracts from and denies class conflicts in capitalism, but he points out that fascists stress national unity as opposed to class conflicts and want to preserve the existing social order, i.e. capitalism.

Max Horkheimer writes that "whoever is not willing to talk about capitalism should also keep quiet about fascism."¹⁹ This statement should be understood in a double sense: a) Capitalism is the context of fascism. Economic, social, political, and ideological crises of capitalist society and their intersection increase the likelihood that fascist movements emerge and that a fascist society emerges; b) Fascism plays an ideological role in capitalism. Fascism as ideology distracts from the role that capitalism and class play in social problems by scapegoating constructed enemies of the nation who are presented

as causing society's problems. The implication is that fascists advocate terror against constructed enemies instead of challenging the systemic causes of society's problems. Fascism does not challenge but practically deepens class society and capitalism. Fascism is a particular form of capitalist society.

Horkheimer and Adorno analyse the dialectic of the Enlightenment, the "self-destruction of enlightenment"²⁰ that results in "the reversion of enlightened civilization to barbarism."²¹ Capitalism's structures of exploitation and domination turn against liberalism's enlightenment values and in the 20th century resulted in Auschwitz. "After the brief interlude of liberalism in which the bourgeois kept one another in check, power is revealing itself as archaic terror in a fascistically rationalized form."²² Horkheimer and Adorno argue that capitalism on the one hand propagates Enlightenment values that aim at advancing freedom, equality, and solidarity, but on the other hand advances possessive individualism and freedom of private property that undermine equality and solidarity so that the capitalist antagonism between private property of capital and inequalities creates fascist potentials.

The concept of fascism underlying the book *Digital Fascism* is based on critical theorists such as Erich Fromm, Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, and Moishe Postone. Fromm and Adorno characterised the fascist as the authoritarian personality. The levels of the psyche and ideology are two important dimensions of fascism, but fascism not only operates at the level of the individual and groups but at all levels of society. Fascism is neither an individual ideology and practice nor a type of society, it is a feature of class societies that can exist at different levels, namely at the levels of individual consciousness and practices, the ideology and practices of groups and organisations, institutions, and society as a whole. Fascism is a practice, ideology, social movement, mode of organisation, and a mode of capitalist and class society. The mentioned critical theorists do not give explicit definitions of fascism, but their theoretical approaches provide indications of how to define fascism.

Any social group, social system, and society has a) organisational principles, b) an identity and practices that bind together and relate individuals and give certain meanings to their existence, c) relations and definition of relations to the outside world, d) ways of how problems are solved. No matter at what level it is organised, proponents of right-wing authoritarianism are convinced of and propagate a) top-down authoritarian decision-making and the leadership principle as organisational principle, b) nationalism (the belief in the superiority and primacy of a biologically or culturally defined nation over other humans) as identity principle, c) the construction of the friend/enemy scheme that polarises and explains the world as an antagonism between the nation and groups that threaten the nation (such as immigrants, refugees, socialists, liberals, Marxists, religions that are different from the nation's dominant religion, which implies that fascism is often racist, xenophobic, anti-socialist, anti-liberal, anti-Semitic, etc), and d) militant patriarchy that sees the soldier as the ideal citizen, advances patriarchal values that want to confine women to subordinate roles in society, and believe in violence (including, for example, law and order-policies, war, and terror) as the ideal means for solving conflicts and answering to society's problems. These four features are characteristic of right-wing authoritarianism. Figure 1 shows a model of right-wing authoritarianism.



Figure 1: A model of right-wing authoritarianism

Right-wing authoritarianism responds to political-economic crises with ideologies that speak to disenfranchised individuals' psychology. Those who feel politically anxious have an ambiguous relationship to love and hate. They seek for an alternative and identity that promises them hope and they want to express their anger and aggression. Figures like Trump on Twitter and in other forms of public communication institutionalise anxiety by offering opportunities to these individuals for loving the nation and the Leader and expressing hatred against scapegoats. Right-wing authoritarianism works on the level of psychological anxieties, desires, emotions, affects, and instincts. It often prefers post-truth political psychology and ideology to reason.

Conservatism is a form of right-wing authoritarianism that accepts the existence and framework of democracy and practices the four principles of authoritarianism within democratic societies. It does not support terror but rather propagates law and order policies. Right-wing extremism is an ideology, political movement and not a type of society. It shows the tendency to accept and favour violence against constructed enemies but its attacks are mainly limited to political style, ideology, communication, and symbols. Fascism can operate at the level of consciousness, groups, organisations, institutions, and society as a whole. Fascism organises and institutionalises violence and terror as political means, it is a terrorist and exterminatory form of right-wing authoritarianism that aims at establishing a society built on terror against identified enemies that aims at their extermination, institutionalises the practice of the leadership principle, nationalism, the friend/enemy-scheme, and militant patriarchy. Fascism is a response to the antagonisms and crises of capitalist societies and class societies. It tries to mobilise those who are afraid of social decline by promising a better society where the national collective rules, benefits its members, and terrorises and eliminates the constructed enemies who are blamed for society's ills. By scapegoating constructed enemies for society's problems and abstracting from these problems systemic causes and propagating nationalism, fascism plays an ideological role in class societies. It distracts from the connection of society's problems to capitalism and class relations. Bourgeois theories of fascism often abstract from, ignore, or downplay the double role of fascism in capitalism and class society, namely fascism's ideological role in capitalism and capitalism's fascist potentials. Orthodox leftist concepts of fascism in contrast often underestimate, ignore, or downplay aspects of the friend/enemy-scheme, nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and extermination in fascism and reduce fascism to capitalism. Fascism operates on different levels of society, namely the individual,

the group, institutions, and society. Fascism on one level does not automatically lead to fascism on the next level, but each upper level presupposes the existence of fascism on the lower levels. For example, a fascist society is based on fascist institutions, groups and individuals but is more than the sum of fascist institutions, groups and individuals.

We can define fascism as anti-democratic, anti-socialist and terrorist ideology, practice, and mode of organisation of groups, institutions and society that is based on the combination of a) the leadership principle, b) nationalism, c) the friend/enemy scheme and d) militant patriarchy (the idealisation of the soldier, the practice of patriarchy, the subordination of women, war, violence and terror as political means) and the use of terror against constructed enemies, aims at establishing a fascist society that is built on the use of terror and the institutionalisation of the four fascist principles in society, tries to mobilise individuals who fear the loss of property, status, power, reputation in light of the antagonisms as its supporters, and plays an ideological role in capitalist and class societies by blaming scapegoats for society's ills and presenting society's problems as an antagonism between the nation and foreigners and enemies of the nation so that fascism distracts attention from the systemic roles of class and capitalism in society's problems and from the class contradiction between capital and labour. Fascism often propagates a one-dimensional, one-sided and personalising "anti-capitalism" that constructs the nation as political fetish and an antagonism between the unity of a nation's capital and labour on the one side and a particular form of capital or economy or production or community on the other side that is presented as destroying the nation's economic, political and cultural survival.

We want to now briefly discuss examples of critical theory approaches that have influenced the development of the understanding of fascism underlying this book.

Frankfurt School critical theorist Franz L. Neumann²³ defines fascism as "dictatorship of the fascist (National Socialist) party, the bureaucracy, the army and big business – dictatorship over the whole of the people, for the complete organization of the nation for imperialist war".

Neumann here identifies some core characteristics of fascism:

1. Fascism is based on authoritarian leadership;
2. Fascism is nationalist; it propagates that "employers and workers work together in perfect harmony"²⁴ although class society and the division of labour continue to exist
3. Fascism is a dictatorial form of capitalism;
4. Fascism uses militaristic means (such as war, terrorism, and imperialism).
5. A feature that is missing is that fascism uses the friend-enemy scheme for creating imagined enemies and scapegoats in order to distract from social problem's foundations in class inequality and power asymmetries.

The historian, political economist and philosopher Moishe Postone²⁵ argues that the analysis of fascism should not be reduced to its definition as "a terroristic, bureaucratic

police state operating in the immediate interests of big capital, based on authoritarian.²⁶ structures, glorifying the family and using racism as one means of social cohesion “He stresses that extermination is a central feature of fascism. In the case of Nazi-Germany, the Shoah – the project of the extermination of the Jews that is symbolised by Auschwitz – is a central defining feature. “No analysis of National Socialism which cannot account for the extermination of European Jewry is fully adequate.”²⁷

Postone has given special attention to the analysis of Nazi-fascism and anti-Semitism as the form of the friend/enemy-scheme that dominates in Nazi-fascism and has brought about the Shoah as terrorist project of extermination. He sees Nazi-fascism and Auschwitz based on Horkheimer and Adorno as the consequence of capitalism and characterises Auschwitz as negative factory:

“A capitalist factory is a place where value is produced, which ‘unfortunately’ has to take the form of the production of goods. The concrete is produced as the necessary carrier of the abstract. The extermination camps were not a terrible version of such a factory but, rather, should be seen as its grotesque, Arian, ‘anti-capitalist’ negation. Auschwitz was a factory to ‘destroy value,’ i.e., to destroy the personifications of the abstract. Its organization was that of a fiendish industrial process, the aim of which was to ‘liberate’ the concrete from the abstract. The first step was to dehumanize, that is, to rip the ‘mask’ of humanity away and reveal the Jews for what ‘they really are’ – ‘Müsselmänner,’ shadows, ciphers, abstractions. The second step was then to eradicate that abstractness, to transform it into smoke, trying in the process to wrest away the last remnants of the concrete material ‘use-value’: clothes, gold, hair, soap”²⁸

The political theorist Daniel Woodley²⁹ discusses features of a critical theory of fascism. He builds a critical understanding of fascism on the works of Karl Marx and Moishe Postone³⁰ and interprets fascism as a political version of fetishism concept. Woodley sees fascism as “a populist ideology which seeks, through a mythology of unity and identity, to project a ‘common instinctual fate’ (uniform social status) between bourgeois and proletarianized groups, eliding the reality of social distinction in differentiated class societies.”³¹ Woodley³² writes in this context that “the social function of fascism is to create a unity of social forces incorporating propertied interests, lower-middle class voters and plebeian elements”.

Fascism aims at creating a particular model of society:

“[F]ascism must itself be understood as a political commodity: Fascism is not simply a subjectively generated, reactive strategy – a desperate attempt by atomized individuals to overcome the disenchantment and inauthenticity of modernity – but an aesthetic innovation which transcends existing patterns of differentiation and political subjectification to disrupt established narratives of history and progress. [...] the fetishization of communal identities which conceal the true nature of the commodity as a structured social practice, bridging the gap between the specificity of the nation-state (as the nexus

linking culture and power) and the rationalization of circuits of capital.”³³

What is Digital Fascism?

Digital fascism means the communication of fascism online as well as fascist groups' and individuals' use of digital technologies as means of information, communication, and organisation. Fascism is a particular, terrorist form of right-wing authoritarianism that aims at killing the identified enemies by the use of violence, terror, and war.

Digital fascism means that fascists utilise digital technologies such as computers, the Internet, mobile phones, apps, social media, etc. in order to a) communicate internally so that they co-ordinate the organisation of fascist practices and b) communicate to the public the leadership principle, nationalism, applications of the friend/enemy scheme, and threats of violence as well as the propagation of violence, militarism, terror, war, law-and-order politics, and extermination directed against the constructed enemies and scapegoats in order to try to find followers, mobilise supporters, and terrorise constructed enemies.

In digital fascism, fascists make use of digital technologies for trying to advance violence, terror, and war as means for the establishment of a fascist society. Scapegoats that ideology constructs and against whom it agitates online include, for example, socialists and immigrants. The scapegoats that fascist ideology constructs and against whom it agitates online include, for example, immigrants, socialists, liberals, intellectuals, experts, and democrats. In their goal to advance fascist society, digital fascists make use of digital technologies and their particular features. There is a number of key characteristics of digital fascism:

1. *Fascist convergence:*

Networked computer technologies enable to convergence of one-to-one and the convergence of information-, communication- and production-technologies in one digital platform. As a consequence, fascist digital communication is based on converging forms of communication and the convergence of activities. The convergence of social roles on social media supports fascist ideology's spreading on the Internet.

2. *User-generated fascism and fascist prosumption:*

Networked computers are not just information and communication technologies but also means of production. The computer is a means of communication and a means of production, it enables consumers of information to become producers of information, so-called “prosumers” (productive consumption), which resulted in the emergence of user-generated content on the Internet. Digital fascism utilises these digital capacities in the form of user-generated fascist content and fascist prosumers who are active on social media platforms.

3. *Interactive and multimedia fascism:*

The Internet is interactive and multimedia-based: users change the status of Internet applications by entering commands and navigate in individual forms through combinations of digital texts, images, sounds, videos, and animations.

Digital fascism utilises the interactive and multimedia capacities of networked computing.

4. *Hypertextual, networked fascism:*

The World Wide Web is a networked of interlinked online texts, sites and platforms. Digital fascism makes use of this networked character of the WWW so that there are fascist networks, platforms and communities on the Internet, the WWW, and social media and fascist ideology and practices spread on mainstream sites and platforms.

5. *Fascist co-operation:*

The networked computer supports online collaboration. Digital fascism makes use of the co-operative potentials of the Internet so that fascist co-operate in their goal to establish fascist societies.

6. *Fascist tabloidisation*

The Internet enables the combination of piece of information that are devoid of context (decontextualisation). It supports the blurring of the boundaries between the real and the virtual, reality and fiction, truth and ideology. Internet communication operates with high-speed flows of vast amounts of information. The logic of tabloidisation shapes the Internet in the form of the accelerated production, distribution and consumption of often superficial and sensationalist information. Digital fascism makes use of tabloidisation on the Internet in order to spread fake news, post-truth culture, algorithmic politics, and filter bubbles.

7. *Fascist surveillance:*

On the Internet, private, semi-public and public information converges. This means that fascists on the one hand are enabled to collect private, semi-public and public data about their enemies that enters their practices. On the other hand, fascist activities can also be traced, documented and tracked online. Fascist surveillance means the online surveillance of and by fascists.

Gáspár Miklós Tamás³⁴ argues that fascism is not limited to German Nazi-fascism that organised the Nazi state in the years from 1933 until 1945 and to Italian fascism (1922-1943), but changes historically. He characterises contemporary fascism as post-fascism, by which he understands a “cluster of policies, practices, routines, and ideologies” that constitute an unclassical form of fascism that shares with classical fascism the “hostility to universal citizenship” and the distinctions between nation/enemies and citizens/non-citizens. “Post-fascism does not need stormtroopers and dictators. [...] Cutting the civic and human community in two: this is fascism”. Post-fascism argues for installing and practices the constructed enemies’ “suspension of [...] civic and human rights”. Tamás utilises Ernst Fraenkel’s³⁵ notion of the dual state: there is one part of the state, the normative state, that defines and guarantees rights for regular citizens; and another part of the state, the prerogative state, that discriminates, oppresses, marginalises those who are defined as non-citizens and enemies of the state. “By the Prerogative State we mean that governmental system which exercises unlimited arbitrariness and violence unchecked by any legal guarantees, and by the Normative State an administrative body endowed with elaborate powers for safeguarding the legal order as expressed in statutes, decisions of the courts, and activities of the administrative agencies.”³⁶

Post-fascism utilises all means necessary for destroying defined enemies and to construct and attack them as scapegoats for society's problems so that there is a distraction from the actual material causes of these problems. Classical fascism operated in the context of the crisis of financialised, industrial, state monopoly capitalism. Contemporary fascism has operated in the context of the crisis of financialised, digital, neoliberal capitalism. Classical fascism used stormtroopers and monopolised, state-controlled broadcast media (such as the Volksempfänger). Contemporary fascism, among other means, uses troll armies and social media in order to attack defined enemies. Classical fascism was strictly organised top-down based on the leadership principle. Contemporary fascism fetishises the leader and more combines fascist leadership with networked, decentralised organisation. Classical fascism openly opposed democracy. Contemporary fascism often disguises itself as and claims to be democratic. Classical fascism defined the enemy primarily in terms of race and biology, contemporary fascism more defines the enemy based on culture and religion. Both classical and contemporary fascism construct conspiracy theories about a union of socialists, liberals, experts, and minorities (Jews, immigrants, refugees, people of colour, Muslims, etc.) that are said to rule the world. Classical fascism often racialised this proclaimed union, whereas contemporary fascism constructs such a union as one of "globalisers", "metropolitan elites", "political correctness", "cultural Marxism", etc. Classical fascism operated based on the central organisation of propaganda and lies for which it utilised broadcasting and mass events. Contemporary fascism also spreads propaganda and lies, but combines a central ideological apparatus with the organisation of user-generated post-truth, user-generated fake news and filter bubbles that spread fascist ideology. Both contemporary and classical fascism appeal to human consciousness by combining emotions and ideology.

Right-wing authoritarianism and fascism involve a high degree of polarisation. It is difficult to convince those who believe in racism, nationalism, authoritarianism of the problems these worldviews entail. Rational debate is often not possible and not welcome. In the long run, only a society that strengthens equality and overcomes exploitation and domination can undermine the roots of fascism. In the short-term, only reforms that redistribute wealth and power coupled with the advancement of the general level of education and critique of and deconstruction of false news, post-truth culture, and ideology can help to weaken fascism and digital fascism. The digital means of information and communication are not just tools that help spreading but also tools for challenging fascist ideology.

Notes

1. Georgi Dimitrov, *Selected Works*, vol. 2 (Sofia: Sofia Press, 1972), 8.
2. Leon Trotsky, *Fascism What It Is and How to Fight* (pathfinder, 1944), 14, 34.
3. Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle against Fascism in Germany* (pathfinder, 2022), 367.
4. Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 98, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511570926>.
5. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Place of publication not identified: Free Thought Books, 1922), 96.
6. Joseph Goebbels, "The Little ABC of National Socialists," [https://libraryofagarrtha.com/Politics/National%20Socialism/Josef%20Goebbels/The%20little%20abc%20of%20National%20Socialists%20\(Joseph%20Goebbels\)%20\(z-lib.org\).pdf](https://libraryofagarrtha.com/Politics/National%20Socialism/Josef%20Goebbels/The%20little%20abc%20of%20National%20Socialists%20(Joseph%20Goebbels)%20(z-lib.org).pdf), 1925.
7. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 288.
8. Moishe Postone, "Anti-Semitism and National Socialism: Notes on the German Reaction to 'Holocaust,'" *New German Critique*, no. 19 (1980): 115, <https://doi.org/10.2307/487974>.
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