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Fascist Ideology in the Twentieth Century: Media, Economics, and Literary Representation

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Abstract

The study of fascism, over the years, has evolved considerably since the mid-twentieth century. It has moved beyond historical analysis to encompass interdisciplinary approaches that examine its ideological foundations, communication mechanisms, and cultural manifestations across time and space. This paper explores how fascism is both a political phenomenon and a cultural construct. It analyzes how fascist ideology operates through the network of nationalism, authoritarian communication, and literary representation. Drawing upon critical theoretical frameworks, particularly those developed by the Frankfurt School and contemporary scholars like Christian Fuchs, this paper examines fascism not merely as a historical aberration but rather as a systematic form of authoritarian capitalism that employs specific cultural communicative strategies to maintain power.

Keywords: Capitalism, Culture, Fascism, Ideology, Nationalism

Introduction

Fascism represents a sophisticated ideological system that transcends the simple political categorization and studies. It functions as what Franz Neumann termed the "Behemoth" or a form of authoritarian capitalism that hollows the democratic institutions while maintaining and strengthening capitalist economic structures. Through an analysis of nationalism as political fetishism, the paper seeks to highlight the role of communication technologies in fascist propaganda, and the intersection of literature with totalitarian ideology. It also demonstrates how fascist movements exploit cultural anxieties across time and space to construct fictive ethnic communities that serve capitalist class interests.

Theoretical Foundations: Understanding Fascism as Authoritarian Capitalism

The Frankfurt School's analysis of fascism provides a crucial theoretical groundwork for understanding the ideological mechanisms of fascism. Theodor Adorno and

his colleagues from Frankfurt School of thought, identified authoritarianism as a personality structure characterized by sadomasochistic tendencies, where individuals simultaneously submit to authority while dominating those perceived as weaker traditionally. (Adorno *et al.*, 1950) ^[1] The Authoritarian Personality). This psychological framework highlights how fascist ideology appeals to individuals experiencing social displacement or economic anxiety, offering them a fake sense of superiority through identification with the nation-state.

Franz Neumann's concept of the "Behemoth" proves particularly relevant and important for the contemporary analysis of fascism. Neumann argued that a fascist society represents "the open dictatorship of capital" that results in "subordination of all remaining social classes under the executive" (Fuchs 251). This understanding challenges the traditional interpretations that view fascism as solely anti-capitalist, it reveals instead how fascist movements serve capitalist interests directly or indirectly by channeling the class conflict into nationalist and racist directions.

Nationalism as Political Fetishism

Contemporary scholar Christian Fuchs extends the Marxist analysis of fascism by identifying nationalism as a form of political fetishism that "fetishises the nation and thereby distracts the ordinary citizen from the class structures" (243). This theoretical framework illuminates how fascist movements construct what Étienne Balibar terms as the "fictive ethnicity". It is an artificial community based on imagined biological or cultural commonalities that serve to obscure and construe the economic exploitation.

The concept of fictive ethnicity operates through two levels of primary mechanisms. At the first level, linguistic nationalism, which constructs national communities through shared language and education. At the second level, biological nationalism, which relies solely on the racialized concepts of blood and soil (Fuchs 242). Both forms serve the same ideological function, i.e., deflecting the attention from capitalist class structures by creating a sense of artificial unity between exploitation and exploited classes under the banner of national identity.

The Communication of Fascist Ideology

The relationship between communication technologies and fascist ideology represents a key area of investigation. Fascist movements have historically demonstrated remarkable adaptability in exploiting new media forms to disseminate their message. From Hitler's use of radio broadcasting to contemporary far-right movements' exploitation of social media platforms, fascist communication strategies however reveal consistent patterns despite technological changes.

Fuchs's typology of communication media provides a useful framework for analyzing fascist propaganda strategies that have been employed over the years. Primary media i.e., direct human communication enables fascist movements to create an intimate bond between leaders and their followers through rallies and speeches. Secondary media i.e., print and visual materials allows for the mass distribution of the nationalist symbols and narratives. Tertiary and quaternary media or the recorded and broadcast content, extends fascist messaging through entertainment and news programming. Finally, quinary media for example, social media and user-generated content, enables the viral spread of fascist ideology through seemingly organic peer-to-peer communication.

The Friend/Enemy Distinction

Carl Schmitt's concept of the friend/enemy distinction, while not explicitly fascist, has been largely appropriated by fascist movements to structure their ideological worldviews. This dualistic framework of friend and enemy, constructs society as perpetually threatened by a series of internal and external enemies, justifying authoritarian measures and violent suppression of the opposition. The enemy serves multiple ideological functions, scapegoating social problems, creating artificial unity among diverse class interests, and providing psychological satisfaction through a series of channeled aggression.

The construction of enemies, however, follows predictable patterns across fascist movements. Internal enemies typically include immigrants, ethnic minorities, leftist political organizations, and intellectuals groups that can be

easily blamed for the economic problems without challenging capitalist structures. External enemies on the other hand encompass foreign nations, international organizations, and global economic forces, allowing fascist movements to channel anti-capitalist sentiment into nationalist directions while preserving domestic capitalist relations.

Literary Representation and Fascist Aesthetics

Literature plays a complex and vital role within fascist cultural systems, serving both as a vehicle for ideological transmission and a site of potential resistance simultaneously. Fascist movements across cultures typically promote literature that reinforces nationalist mythology, glorifies violence and sacrifice, and presents a simplified moral universe where good and evil are clearly demarcated. However, literature's inherent complexity and ambiguity can also provide ample space for critique and subversion of fascist ideology.

The case of George Orwell provides a particularly instructive example of literature's relationship to fascist ideology. Orwell's experiences in the Spanish Civil War shaped his understanding of totalitarianism, leading to literary works that expose the mechanisms of authoritarian control (For example, *Hope Lies in the Proles*). Orwell's *1984* and *Animal Farm* also demonstrates literature's capacity to illuminate totalitarian logic while avoiding direct political confrontation that might result in censorship.

Aesthetic Politics and the Fascist Spectacle

Walter Benjamin's concept of the "aestheticization of politics" remains crucial for understanding fascist cultural production. Fascist movements transform political action into an aesthetic spectacle, using ritual, symbolism, and mass choreography to create emotional identifications with the regime. This aesthetic dimension over the years, serves multiple functions. It provides psychological satisfaction for the participants, creates the impression of mass support, and transforms a rational political discourse into an emotional experience.

The fascist spectacle operates through what Susan Sontag identified as a distinctive "fascist aesthetics" characterized by monumentality, uniformity, and the glorification of death. These aesthetic elements appear not only in official fascist art and architecture but also in popular culture, creating a broader aesthetic environment that normalizes authoritarian values and hierarchical social relations.

Industrial Extermination as Fascist Culmination

The Holocaust represents the logical culmination of fascist ideology rather than as an aberrant excess. Moishe Postone's analysis of fascism, reveals Auschwitz as "a factory to 'destroy value'". It is a systematic application of industrial rationality to the project of human extermination. This understanding of fascism challenges interpretations that view the Holocaust solely as an irrational outbreak of primitive barbarism. It reveals instead its deep connection to modern capitalist rationality.

The Holocaust's significance extends beyond its immediate historical context to illuminate fascism's relationship to modernity and capitalism. The same organizational principles that enabled mass industrial productions were

applied to mass extermination, revealing the potential for rational systems to serve fundamentally irrational ends easily. This analysis has profound implications for understanding the contemporary authoritarian movements that similarly exploit the modern communication and organizational technologies for anti-democratic purposes.

Anti-Semitism as Pseudo-Critique of Capitalism

Fascist anti-Semitism functions as what Postone terms a "short-circuited pseudo-critique of capitalism." Rather than challenging capitalist relations directly, fascist ideology displaces anti-capitalist sentiment onto Jewish people or the minority, who are identified with the finance capital while industrial capital is presented as authentically national, something which should be protected. This ideological maneuver allows fascist movements to channel rational grievances against capitalism into directions that ultimately serve capitalist interests directly.

The persistence of the anti-Semitic conspiracy theories in contemporary political discourse reveals a continued relevance of this analysis across time and space. From QAnon narratives about global financial conspiracies to populist attacks on the cosmopolitan elites, contemporary authoritarian movements continue to effectively employ anti-Semitic tropes to deflect attention from the core systemic capitalist problems.

Contemporary Relevance and Digital Fascism

The emergence of social media platforms, over the years, has created new opportunities for the fascist communication that required updated theoretical analysis. Unlike the traditional mass media, which requires significant resources to access, social media platforms enable fascist movements to bypass the traditional gatekeepers and communicate directly with potential supporters. The algorithmic structure of these platforms allows easy amplification of extreme content, creating echo chambers that reinforce fascist world views.

Contemporary fascist movements have proven particularly adept at exploiting social media's affordances. They use memes and humor to make fascist ideas appear harmless, playful and ironic, employing irony poisoning to gradually normalize extreme positions, and coordinate the harassment campaigns against opponents. These strategies reveal how fascist communication adapts quickly to new technological environments while maintaining core ideological commitments.

Authoritarian Capitalism in the Digital Age

The concept of authoritarian capitalism is particularly relevant for understanding contemporary political developments. From Xi Jinping's China to Viktor Orbán's Hungary, one can observe examples of political systems that maintain capitalist economic structures while simultaneously dismantling democratic political institutions. These regimes demonstrate how authoritarian methods can serve capitalist accumulation, challenging liberal assumptions about the necessary connection between capitalism and democracy.

Digital technologies play a crucial role in contemporary authoritarian capitalism, enabling unprecedented levels of surveillance and social control. The same platforms that

fascist movements use for communication also at the same time provide states with detailed information about citizens' political beliefs and associations. This dual character of digital technology is simultaneously democratizing and authoritarian. Requires careful analysis to understand its political implications.

Cultural Resistance to Fascist Ideology

Literature and cultural production provide important sites for anti-fascist resistance. The tradition of anti-fascist writing, from Orwell and Brecht to contemporary authors like Toni Morrison and Roberto Bolaño, demonstrates how literary texts can expose fascist logic and provide alternative visions of social organization. However, cultural resistance alone is insufficient without broader political organization.

The concept of "anti-fascist praxis" suggests the need for an integrated approach that combines cultural critique with political action. This might include supporting independent media organizations, creating alternative educational institutions, and building solidarity networks that can resist fascist attempts to divide oppressed communities. Literature and culture play an important role in this broader project by providing imaginative resources for envisioning post-capitalist alternatives.

The Necessity of Socialist Alternatives

The analysis presented here suggests that effective anti-fascist resistance requires socialist alternatives to the capitalist social organization. Since fascism represents a particular form of capitalist crisis response, defeating fascism requires addressing its underlying causes in capitalist social relations. This however does not mean that short-term defensive measures are unnecessary, but rather that lasting victory over fascism requires fundamental social transformation.

Socialist alternatives must address both the material conditions that create fascist constituencies and the cultural narratives that make fascist ideology appealing. This includes development of economic policies that provide security and dignity for working people, cultural programs that celebrate human diversity rather than nationalist mythology, and political institutions that enable genuine democratic participation.

Conclusion

Fascism represents a sophisticated ideological system that serves capitalist class interests through nationalist mythology and authoritarian political organization. By examining fascism's communicative mechanisms, cultural manifestations, and contemporary relevance, one can better and easily understand both its historical significance and its continued threat.

The literary dimension of fascist ideology is particularly important because literature provides both a vehicle and site of resistance for fascist propaganda. Understanding how fascist narratives operate in the cultural contexts enables the development of more effective counter-narratives that can challenge fascist common sense.

Perhaps most importantly, defeating fascism requires more than defensive measures against particular movements or leaders. Instead, it requires a fundamental transformation of

the capitalist social relations that create the conditions for fascist emergence. Literature and cultural production can play important roles in this broader transformative project by providing imaginative resources for envisioning and creating more just social arrangements.

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