DIGITAL FASCISM

MEDIA, COMMUNICATION AND SOCIETY
VOLUME FOUR

CHRISTIAN FUCHS

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Digital Fascism

This fourth volume in Christian Fuchs's *Media, Communication and Society* book series outlines the theoretical foundations of digital fascism and presents case studies of how fascism is communicated online.

Digital Fascism presents and engages with theoretical approaches and empirical studies that allow us to understand how fascism, right-wing authoritarianism, xenophobia, and nationalism are communicated on the Internet. The book builds on theoretical foundations from key theorists such as Theodor W. Adorno, Franz L. Neumann, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Wilhelm Reich, Leo Löwenthal, Moishe Postone, Günther Anders, M. N. Roy, and Henry Giroux. The book draws on a range of case studies, including Nazi-celebrations of Hitler's birthday on Twitter, the 'red scare 2.0' directed against Jeremy Corbyn, and political communication online (Donald Trump, Boris Johnson, the Austrian presidential election). These case studies analyse right-wing communication online and on social media. Fuchs argues for the safeguarding of the democratic public sphere and that slowing down and decommodifying the logic of the media can advance and renew debate culture in the age of digital authoritarianism, fake news, echo chambers, and filter bubbles.

Each chapter focuses on a particular dimension of digital fascism or a critical theorist whose work helps us to illuminate how fascism and digital fascism work, making this book an essential reading for both undergraduate and postgraduate students of media and communication studies, sociology, politics, and political economy as well as anyone who wants to understand what digital fascism is and how it works.

Christian Fuchs is a critical theorist of communication and society. He is co-editor of the journal *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*. He is author of many publications, including the books *Digital Capitalism* (2022), *Foundations of Critical Theory* (2022), *Communicating COVID-19: Everyday Life, Digital Capitalism, and Conspiracy Theories in Pandemic Times* (2021), *Marxist Humanism and Communication Theory* (2021), *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (3rd edition 2021), *Communication and Capitalism: A Critical Theory* (2020), *Marxism: Karl Marx's Fifteen Key Concepts for Cultural and Communication Studies* (2020), *Nationalism on the Internet: Critical Theory and Ideology in the Age of Social Media and Fake News* (2020), *Rereading Marx in the Age of Digital Capitalism* (2019), *Digital Demagogue: Authoritarian Capitalism in the Age of Trump and Twitter* (2016), *Digital Labour and Karl Marx* (2014), and *Internet and Society* (2008).

Digital Fascism

Media, Communication and Society
Volume Four

Christian Fuchs

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Chapter One
Introduction

1.1 This Book's Chapters

This book asks: how is fascism communicated on the Internet? It outlines theoretical foundations of digital fascism and presents case studies that involve how fascism is communicated online.

The book at hand is the fourth volume of a series of books titled *Media, Communication and Society*. The overall aim of *Media, Communication and Society* is to outline foundations of a critical theory of communication and digital communication in society. It is a multi-volume book series situated on the intersection of communication theory, sociology, and philosophy. The overall questions that *Media, Communication and Society* deals with are: what is the role of communication in society? What is the role of communication in capitalism? What is the role of communication in digital capitalism?

Digital Fascism presents and engages with theoretical approaches and empirical studies that allow us to understand how fascism, right-wing authoritarianism, xenophobia, and nationalism are communicated on the Internet. The book engages with the theories of Theodor W. Adorno, Franz L. Neumann, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Wilhelm Reich, Leo Löwenthal, Moishe Postone, Günther Anders, M. N. Roy, Henry Giroux, and Martin Heidegger. It presents analyses of how Nazis celebrate Hitler's birthday on Twitter, how user-generated ideology constructed a red scare 2.0 directed against Jeremy Corbyn, how right-wing authoritarianism utilised social media in the context of Donald Trump, Boris Johnson, and the Austrian presidential election, and how slowing down the logic of the media ("slow media") can advance and renew debate culture in the age of digital authoritarianism, fake news, and filter bubbles.

The book is organised in the form of fifteen chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. There are three parts. Part I (Foundations) engages with theoretical and philosophical aspects of fascism (Chapters 2–6). Part II (Applications) presents chapters based on critical theories of fascism and empirical analyses of how fascism and right-wing

authoritarianism are communicated on the Internet and social media (Chapters 7-16). Part III is the conclusion that presents a concept of digital fascism.

The book follows the method that Marx called the advancement from the abstract to the concrete. In the Introduction to the Grundrisse, he described this method as follows:

> Labour seems a quite simple category. The conception of labour in this general form – as labour as such – is also immeasurably old. Nevertheless, when it is economically conceived in this simplicity, 'labour' is as modern a category as are the relations which create this simple abstraction. […] As a rule, the most general abstractions arise only in the midst of the richest possible concrete development, where one thing appears as common to many, to all. […] The simplest abstraction, then, which modern economics places at the head of its discussions, and which expresses an immeasurably ancient relation valid in all forms of society, nevertheless achieves practical truth as an abstraction only as a category of the most modern society. […] The categories which express its [bourgeois society's] relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also allows insights into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations out of whose ruins and elements it built itself up, whose partly still unconquered remnants are carried along within it, whose mere nuances have developed explicit significance within it, etc. […] The bourgeois economy thus supplies the key to the ancient, etc. […] the latest form regards the previous ones as steps leading up to itself […]
>
> The order obviously has to be (1) the general, abstract determinants which obtain in more or less all forms of society, but in the above-explained sense. (2) The categories which make up the inner structure of bourgeois society and on which the fundamental classes rest. Capital, wage labour, landed property. Their inter relation. Town and country. The three great social classes. Exchange between them. Circulation. Credit system (private). (3) Concentration of bourgeois society in the form of the state. Viewed in relation to itself. The 'unproductive' classes. Taxes. State debt. Public credit. The population. The colonies. Emigration. (4) The international relation of production. International division of labour. International exchange. Export and import. Rate of exchange. (5) The world market and crises. (Marx 1857/ 1858, 103–108)

In dialectical analyses of society, there is a dialectic of the abstract and the concrete. For understanding a concrete social phenomenon such as wage-labour or a society such as capitalist society, we need to understand what is common to all forms of work and all societies and how these general categories and the forms of them that existed in preceding epochs are sublated (*aufgehoben*) in the current social and societal forms.

If we want to understand how digital fascism works, we need to understand what fascism is in general and how it has worked historically. Our analyses and understandings of digital fascism should be based on and go beyond the analysis of historical examples.

Such insights should be the basis and inform our understandings of digital fascism. The analysis of digital fascism needs to preserve and at the same time go beyond its analytical basis. There are novel aspects in digital fascism that are expressions of general aspects of fascism and go beyond previous forms of fascism. The old and the more general aspects are sublated in the new and the more concrete aspects of the world. Hegel speaks in this context of *Aufhebung*, a term that is often translated from German into English as "sublation", a term that means substitution, elimination, and preservation at the same time. The German word *Aufhebung* means at the same time elimination, preservation, and lifting something up. Digital fascism is a preservation of the general characteristics of fascism. It also is in certain ways different from previous forms of fascism. And it is fascism organised on a new level.

Part I of this book presents general analyses of fascism and related phenomena such as authoritarian capitalism, ideology, nationalism, anti-Semitism, and racism. Part II presents more concrete analyses of right-wing authoritarianism and fascism on the Internet that build on the insights from part I. The conclusion to the book (part III, Chapter 17) brings together the analyses of the book, the foundational analyses of part I and the concrete analyses of part II, at a meta-level, and works out and presents a concept of digital fascism.

Each chapter in this book focuses on a particular dimension of digital fascism or a critical theorist whose work helps us to illuminate how fascism and digital fascism works. Here are the main questions that each chapter asks:

- Chapter 2: how can Franz L. Neumann's critical theory help us to understand fascism?
- Chapter 3: how can Günther Anders's critical theory help us to understand fascism?

- Chapter 4: how can M. N. Roy's critical theory help us to understand fascism?
- Chapters 5 and 6: what are and should be the implications of the publication of Martin Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* for the reception of Heidegger in the study, theory, and philosophy of media, communication, and technology?
- Chapter 7: how did Internet users communicate about Hitler on his 127th birthday on Twitter?
- Chapter 8: how was Jeremy Corbyn during the Labour Leadership Election framed in discourses on Twitter in an ideological manner and how have such ideological discourses been challenged?
- Chapter 9: how did supporters of the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) express their support of the party's candidate Norbert Hofer in the 2016 Austrian presidential election on Facebook?
- Chapter 10: how does the Frankfurt School help us to understand Donald Trump's Twitter authoritarianism?
- Chapter 11: how does the critical theorist Henry Giroux assess Donald Trump?
- Chapter 12: why is it that right-wing authoritarian populism in recent times has become much more popular than left-wing movements? How do right-wing authoritarian movements communicate? Why is it that right-wing political communication strategies seem to garner and result in mass support?
- Chapter 13: how did Donald Trump incite a coup attempt (the storm on the Capitol on 6 January 2021)?
- Chapter 14: what parallels are there between Joachim C. Fest's Hitler biography and Michael Wolff's book *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*?
- Chapter 15: how did Boris Johnson communicate about Brexit on social media?
- Chapter 16: how can the logic of the media be decelerated ("slow media") in order to advance debate and the public sphere in the age of digital authoritarianism, fake news, and filter bubbles?

In this book the readers encounter a number of theorists who will now be introduced:

Theodor W. Adorno, Franz L. Neumann, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Wilhelm Reich, Leo Löwenthal, Moishe Postone, Günther Anders, M. N. Roy, Henry Giroux, and Martin Heidegger.

Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969) was a German philosopher and sociologist who together with Max Horkheimer shaped the approach of Frankfurt School critical theory. Among Adorno's most well-known works are *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (written

together with Horkheimer), *The Authoritarian Personality*, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, *Hegel: Three Studies*, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, *Negative Dialectics*, and *Aesthetic Theory*. Chapter 3 (Adorno and the Media in Digital Capitalism) analyses how Adorno's works can inform the critical analysis of digital capitalism.

Franz Leopold Neumann (1900–1954) was a political theorist associated with the Frankfurt School. He obtained a doctoral degree in legal studies at the University of Frankfurt with the dissertation *A Legal-Philosophical Introduction to A Treatise on the Relationship between the State and Punishment* (Neumann 1923). After that, he worked as assistant of Hugo Sinzheimer, who was a professor of legal studies at Frankfurt University. Neumann was a practising advocate who specialised in labour law. In 1927, Neumann together with Ernst Fraenkel started a lawyer's office in Berlin. They both worked for trade unions: Neumann specialised on legal cases for the construction workers' union, and Fraenkel focused on support for the metal workers' union. Neumann became the German Social Democratic Party's main legal advisor at a time when the Nazis and Hitler gained strength in Germany. When Hitler came to power in 1933, the legal office had to be closed. Neumann had to flee from Nazi Germany and went first to London, where he completed a second PhD, and then to the USA. His main book *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933–1944* analyses the connection of capitalism and fascism.

Erich Fromm (1900–1980) was a Marxist-humanist philosopher, psychoanalyst, and sociologist. He coined the notion of the authoritarian character. He was a member of the Frankurt School in the 1930s. Fromm's approach combines Marx's theory and Freud's psychoanalysis. He is one of the main representatives of Marxist psycho-analysis and Marxist humanism. Among his most important books are *Escape from Freedom*, *The Sane Society*, *Marx's Concept of Man*, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, and the collected volume *Socialist Humanism*.

Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979) was together with Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer the major thinker in the first generation of the Frankfurt School. He was a philosopher and political theorist who contributed to the development of Marxist humanist philosophy and the critique of ideology. He was influenced by Hegel, Marx, and Freud. His major books are *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, *An Essay on Liberation*, and *Counterrevolution and Revolt*.

Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957) was a psychoanalysts, political economist, sociologist, and sexologist. Reich was interested in the analysis of sexuality in capitalism and the connection of fascism, capitalism, ideology, sexuality, and the human psyche. In his book *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, Reich analyses how fascists, especially the Nazis, gained power. He saw the authoritarian family is the cell form of the fascist state and fascist society. Reich anticipated and influenced the notion of the authoritarian personality that was developed by Erich Fromm and Theodor W. Adorno.

Leo Löwenthal (1900–1993) was a philosopher, sociologist, and cultural theorist. He was associated with the Frankfurt School. He had to flee from Nazi Germany to the USA. After the Second World War, he became a professor of sociology at the University of California Berkeley. Among Löwenthal's books are *Literature and the Image of Man*; *Literature, Popular Culture, and Society*; *Prophets of Deceit: A Study of the Techniques of the American Agitator* (together with Norbert Guterman); *Literature and Mass Culture;* and *False Prophets: Studies on Authoritarianism*.

Moishe Postone (1942–2018) was a historian, political economist, and critical theorist. He was a professor of history at the University of Chicago. Postone contributed to the reinterpretation and reactualisation of Marx's theory. Postone gave special attention to Marx's concepts of value that he used for grounding a critical theory of time in capitalism and to Marx's notion of commodity fetishism that he used for the critical analysis of ideology, anti-Semitism, and fascism. His major work is *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*.

Günther Anders (1902–1992) was a philosopher and critical theorist of technology. He analysed how contemporary technologies are used by capital and bureaucracy for advancing alienation and destroying humans' control of society. Anders's most well-known book is the two-volume *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* (*The Outdatedness/ Antiquatedness of the Human Being*). Anders analysed the problems of technology in 20th-century society, the impacts of the media on human beings, destructive technologies such as the atom bomb, and the logic of fascism.

Manabendra Nath Roy (1887–1954) was a philosopher, political theorist, and anti-Stalinist communist activist who founded the Mexican Communist Party and the Communist Party of India. Roy was influenced by both humanism and Marxism. Among his major works are *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution, New Humanism: A Manifesto, Science and Philosophy, Fascism: Its Philosophy, Professions and Practice, Revolution and Counter-Revolution in China.* At the Second Congress of the Comintern

in 1920, Roy presented supplementary theses to Lenin's *Theses on the National and Colonial Questions* and convinced Lenin to agree with his position. Roy put the interaction of capitalism, imperialism, and racism on the agenda of the international communist movement.

Henry Giroux (born in 1943) is one of the founders of critical pedagogy, an approach that combines critical theory and pedagogy. He has worked on the development of a critical theory of education that helps advance citizens' critical thinking and democracy. He is professor, Chair for Scholarship in the Public Interest, and the Paulo Freire Distinguished Scholar in Critical Pedagogy at McMaster University. Among his books are *Theory and Resistance in Education: A Pedagogy for the Opposition*; *Ideology, Culture, and the Process of Schooling*; *On Critical Pedagogy*; *Theory and Resistance in Education: Towards a Pedagogy for the Opposition*; *Disturbing Pleasures: Learning Popular Culture*; *Terror of Neoliberalism: Authoritarianism and the Eclipse of Democracy*; *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education*.

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) was a German philosopher who contributed to the development of phenomenology and existentialism. He was a professor of philosophy at the University of Marburg from 1923 until 1946. He was a member of the Nazi Party from 1933 until 1945 and welcomed Hitler's ascendance to power in 1933. *Being and Time* is Heidegger's major work. Heidegger's *Schwarze Hefte* (*Black Notebooks*) was published as part of the German complete edition of Heidegger's works. The first three volumes were published as one book in 2014 and unleashed a debate about Heidegger and anti-Semitism. Among Heidegger's students were the philosophers Herbert Marcuse, Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

1.1 This Book's Chapters

Chapter 2 ("The Relevance of Franz L. Neumann's Critical Theory Today: *Behemoth* and *Anxiety and Politics* in the New Age of Authoritarian Capitalism") asks: how can Franz L. Neumann's critical theory help us to understand fascism? It provides some background of Neumann's life and works and shows how in the age of new nationalisms, rising right-wing authoritarianism, and authoritarian capitalism, Neumann's works can help us to understand society based on critical theory. There is a special focus on his essay Anxiety and Politics and the book *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933–1944*.

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Chapter 3 ("Günther Anders's Critique of Ideology") asks: how can Günther Anders's critical theory help us to understand fascism? Günther Anders (1902–1992) was an Austrian philosopher, critical theorist, political activist, and a writer of poems, short stories, and novels. Anders sees capitalism as having catastrophic potentials. This chapter analyses Anders' letters to Adolf Eichmann, the SS commander who played a major role in the Nazis' extermination project of the Jews; his exchange of letters with Claude Eatherly, who was involved in dropping the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima; his concept of annihilism (annihilation as nihilism); and his relationship to his former teacher and Nazi Party member Martin Heidegger.

Chapter 4 ("M. N. Roy's Critique of Ideology, Fascism, and Nationalism") asks: how can M. N. Roy's critical theory help us to understand fascism? Manabendra Nath Roy (1887–1954) was the founder of the Communist Parties of Mexico and India and a socialist-humanist philosopher. In the Western world, his works are today widely ignored and forgotten. This chapter introduces some philosophical aspects of Roy's thought. Frankfurt School thinkers such as Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, and Erich Fromm were interested in similar topics as Roy. This chapter also compares the approach of Roy and the Frankfurt School. It shows parallels between Roy and the first generation of the Frankfurt School with respect to themes such as the dialectic of technology and society, the dialectic of the Enlightenment, fascism, nationalism, and authoritarianism. In the age of new nationalisms and authoritarian capitalism, global environmental crises, capitalist crisis, and the digital crisis, socialist-humanist theories such as the one of M. N. Roy can inspire struggles for a humanist and socialist society as antidotes to the acceleration and deepening of society's crises.

Chapter 5 ("Martin Heidegger's Anti-Semitism: Philosophy of Technology and the Media in the Light of the *Black Notebooks*. Implications for the Reception of Heidegger in Media and Communication Studies") asks: what are the implications of the first three volumes of Martin Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* (published as one book in 2014) for the reception of Heidegger in the study, theory, and philosophy of media, communication, and technology? In spring 2014, three volumes of the *Schwarze Hefte* (*Black Notebooks*), Heidegger's philosophical notebooks, were published in the German edition of his collected works. They contain notes taken in the years 1931–1941 and have resulted in public debates about the role of anti-Semitism in Heidegger's thought.

This chapter discusses Theodor W. Adorno and Moishe Postone's contributions to the critical theory of anti-Semitism and applies these approaches for an analysis of

Heidegger's *Black Notebooks*. The analysis shows that the logic of modern technology plays an important role in the *Black Notebooks*. This chapter therefore also revisits some of Heidegger's writings on technology in light of the *Black Notebooks*. There is a logical link between the *Black Notebooks'* anti-Semitism and the analysis of technology in *Being and Time* and *The Question Concerning Technology*. The first publication provides the missing link and grounding for the second and the third. Heidegger's works have had significant influence on studies of the media, communication, and the Internet. Given the anti-Semitism in the *Black Notebooks* and their implications, it is time that Heideggerians abandon Heidegger, and instead focus on alternative traditions of thought. It is now also the moment where scholars should consider stopping to eulogise and reference Heidegger when theorising and analysing the media, communication, culture, technology, digital media, and the Internet.

Chapter 6 ("Anti-Semitism, Anti-Marxism, and Technophobia: The Fourth Volume of Martin Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* (1942–1948)") asks: what are the implications of the fourth volume of Martin Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* (published in 2015) for the reception of Heidegger in the study, theory, and philosophy of media, communication, and technology? The fourth volume of Martin Heidegger's *Schwarze Hefte* (*Black Notebooks*) was published in March 2015. It contains philosophical notes written in the years 1942–1948. This chapter discusses the role of anti-Semitism, the hatred of modernity, democracy, Marxism and socialism, the belittlement of the Nazi system, and the opposition to modern media and technologies that can be found in the book.

Chapter 7 ("Fascism 2.0: Hitler's Birthday on Twitter") asks: how did Internet users communicate about Hitler on his 127th birthday on Twitter? This chapter analyses how Twitter users communicated about Hitler on his 127th birthday. It employs an empirical critique informed by critical Marxist theories of fascism. The analysis is based on a dataset of 4,193 tweets that were posted on 20 April 2016, and that used hashtags such as #Hitler, #AdolfHitler, #HappyBirthdayAdolf, #HappyBirthdayHitler. The results provide indications about how fascism 2.0 works. There are various strategies that fascism 2.0 uses, such as online authoritarianism, online nationalism, an online friend-enemy scheme, and online patriarchy and naturalism. The growth of fascism 2.0 is a consequence of a "fascism-producing" crisis of society that requires adequate anti-fascist responses and strategies.

Chapter 8 ("Red Scare 2.0: User-Generated Ideology in the Age of Jeremy Corbyn and Social Media") asks: how was Jeremy Corbyn during the Labour Leadership Election framed in discourses on Twitter in an ideological manner? How have such ideological

discourses been challenged? The chapter uses ideology critique as method for the investigation of tweets mentioning Jeremy Corbyn that were collected during the final phase of the Labour Party's 2015 leadership election. The analysis shows how user-generated ideology portrays Jeremy Corbyn by creating discourse topics focused on general scapegoating, the economy, foreign politics, culture, and authoritarianism.

Chapter 9 ("Racism, Nationalism and Right-Wing Extremism Online: The 2016 Austrian Presidential Election on Facebook") asks: how did supporters of the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) express their support of the party's candidate Norbert Hofer in the 2016 Austrian presidential election on Facebook? The 2016 Austrian presidential election saw a run-off between the Green Party candidate Alexander Van der Bellen and the Freedom Party of Austria's (FPÖ) far-right candidate Norbert Hofer. This chapter presents the results of a qualitative ideology analysis of 6,755 comments about the presidential election posted on the Facebook pages of FPÖ leader Heinz-Christian Strache and FPÖ candidate Hofer. The results reveal insights into the contemporary political role of the online leadership ideology, online nationalism, new racism online, the friend/enemy-scheme online, and online militarism. Right-wing extremism 2.0 is a complex problem that stands in the context of contemporary crises and demagoguery.

Chapter 10 ("A Frankfurt School Perspective on Donald Trump and His Use of Social Media") asks: how does the Frankfurt School help us to understand Donald Trump's Twitter authoritarianism? This chapter uses the approach of the Frankfurt School for the analysis of how Donald Trump used Twitter. It utilises the concepts of the culture industry, authoritarianism, nationalism, the friend/enemy-scheme, militarism, and patriarchy.

Chapter 11 ("Donald Trump and Neoliberal Fascism") asks: how does the critical theorist Henry Giroux assess Donald Trump? Henry A. Giroux's book *The Terror of the Unforeseen* studies the contemporary negative dialectic of American capitalism and how this dialectic brought forth an authoritarian version of capitalism. This chapter provides a discussion of Giroux's analysis of Trump. *The Terror of the Unforeseen* analyses the conditions that have enabled and led to Donald Trump's rule, its consequences, and possible ways out.

Chapter 12 ("Authoritarian Capitalism, Authoritarian Movements, Authoritarian Communication") asks: why is it that right-wing authoritarian populism in recent times has become much more popular than left-wing movements? How do right-wing authoritarian movements communicate? Why is it that right-wing political communication strategies seem to garner and result in mass support? The critical theory of

authoritarianism advanced by the Frankfurt School and related authors on fascism, Nazism, and the authoritarian personality helps us to critically analyse the communication of authoritarianism. In this context, particularly the works by Franz Leopold Neumann, Erich Fromm, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Leo Löwenthal, and Willhelm Reich are relevant.

Chapter 13 ("Why There Are Certain Parallels Between Joachim C. Fest's Hitler-Biography and Michael Wolff's Trump-Book") asks: what parallels are there between Joachim C. Fest's Hitler biography and Michael Wolff's book *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*? The US journalist Michael Wolff in 2018 published the book *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*, which is one of the most widely read and discussed books about Trump. In the 1970s, the German historian Joachim C. Fest published a biography of Hitler. This chapter discusses if there are parallels between the way Fest portrays Hitler and Wolff analyses Trump.

Chapter 14 ("How Did Donald Trump Incite a Coup Attempt?") asks: how did Donald Trump incite the storm on the Capitol on 6 January 2021? On 6 January 2021, supporters of Donald Trump stormed the Capitol after a Trump rally. The presented research analyses parts of a dataset consisting of Trump's most recent 8,736 tweets as well as Trump's speech given at the rally that preceded the storming of the Capitol. The chapter shows how Trump's speech and use of Twitter triggered violence and that the coup was the consequence of a long chain of events that unfolded as a consequence of Trump's authoritarian ideology, personality, and practices.

Chapter 15 ("Boris Johnson Takes His Brexit Demagoguery to the Social Media Sphere") asks: how did Boris Johnson communicate about Brexit on social media? Boris Johnson makes use of popular culture and social media as tools of populist communication. This chapter analyses how Johnson uses social media and what the implications of this use are for the public sphere.

Chapter 16 ("Slow Media: How to Renew Debate in the Age of Digital Authoritarianism") asks: how can the logic of the media be decelerated ("slow media") in order to advance debate and the public sphere in the age of digital authoritarianism, fake news, and filter bubbles? The rise of authoritarian capitalism has been supported by the capitalist media's logic of tabloidisation and acceleration. This chapter discusses how decelerating and decommercialising the media could help to overcome the culture of fake news, filter bubbles, and fragmented publics that have helped advance authoritarianism.

This Book's Chapters

Chapter 17 ("Conclusion: What is Digital Fascism?") draws conclusions to the book *Digital Fascism*. It engages with definitions of fascism and provides an understanding of digital fascism.

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Marx, Karl. 1857. Introduction. In *Karl Marx: Grundrisse*, 81–111. London: Penguin.

Part III

Conclusion

Chapter Seventeen
Conclusion: What is Digital Fascism?

This book has addressed the question: how is fascism communicated on the Internet? It has outlined theoretical foundations of digital fascism and has presented case studies that study how fascism is communicated online.

The reader will thereby have gained a better understanding of a variety of aspects of and theoretical insights into digital fascism. In the conclusion, based on the findings of this book, we will give an explicit definition of digital fascism. For doing so, we need to first ask: what is fascism? (Section 17.1). Based on this discussion, we will then address the question: what is digital fascism (Section 17.2)?

17.1 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" (Dimitrov 1972 [1935], 8). 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" (Trotsky 1996, 14, 34). "The mission of fascism is not so much to complete the destruction of bourgeois

democracy as to crush the first outlines of proletarian democracy" (Trotsky 1971, 367). 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" (Postone 1980, 98). 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 "exploitation of German labor power in the yoke of world Jewish finance" (Hitler 1941, 906) via financial mechanisms such as loans. Hitler's propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels (1925) argued that the Jew is "the creator and bearer of international stock-market-capitalism, the main enemy of German liberty". Hitler (1941, 288) 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" (Postone 1980, 115).

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" (Goebbels 1925). The whole concept is based on the assumption that there is a "sharp separation of the stock exchange capital from the national economy" (Hitler 1941, 287).

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."
>
> <div align="right">(Postone 1980, 112)</div>

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."
>
> <div align="right">(Griffin 2003, 231–232)</div>

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,

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mass mobilization, and the *Führerprinzip,* positively values violence as end as well as means and tends to normatize war and/or the military virtues" (Payne 1995, 14). 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 an- tiliberal 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" (Laqueur 1996, 90). 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 Manichaean 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)."

(Eatwell 1996, 313–314)

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" (Thompson 2011, 88).

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 widely read biography of Hitler (Kershaw 2008), gives an enumerative characterisation of fascism.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 […]; 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 […] wanted […] a nationalist, authoritarian government. […] 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 […] national unity was advanced as the essential bulwark to the threat of socialism. […] 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)."

(Kershaw 2016, 228–230)

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" (Horkheimer 1939/1989, 78). 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 scape-goating 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" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1947/2002, xvi) that results in "the reversion of enlightened civilization to barbarism" (xix). 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" (68). 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

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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 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 17.1 shows 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 does not use rational arguments, but post-truth political psychology and ideology.

Conservatism is a form of right-wing authoritarianism that accepts the existence and framework of democracy and practises 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, a 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

Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA)

Individual ⇔ Group ⇔ Institution ⇔ Society

RWA's social role: Deflection of attention from structures
of class, capitalism and domination
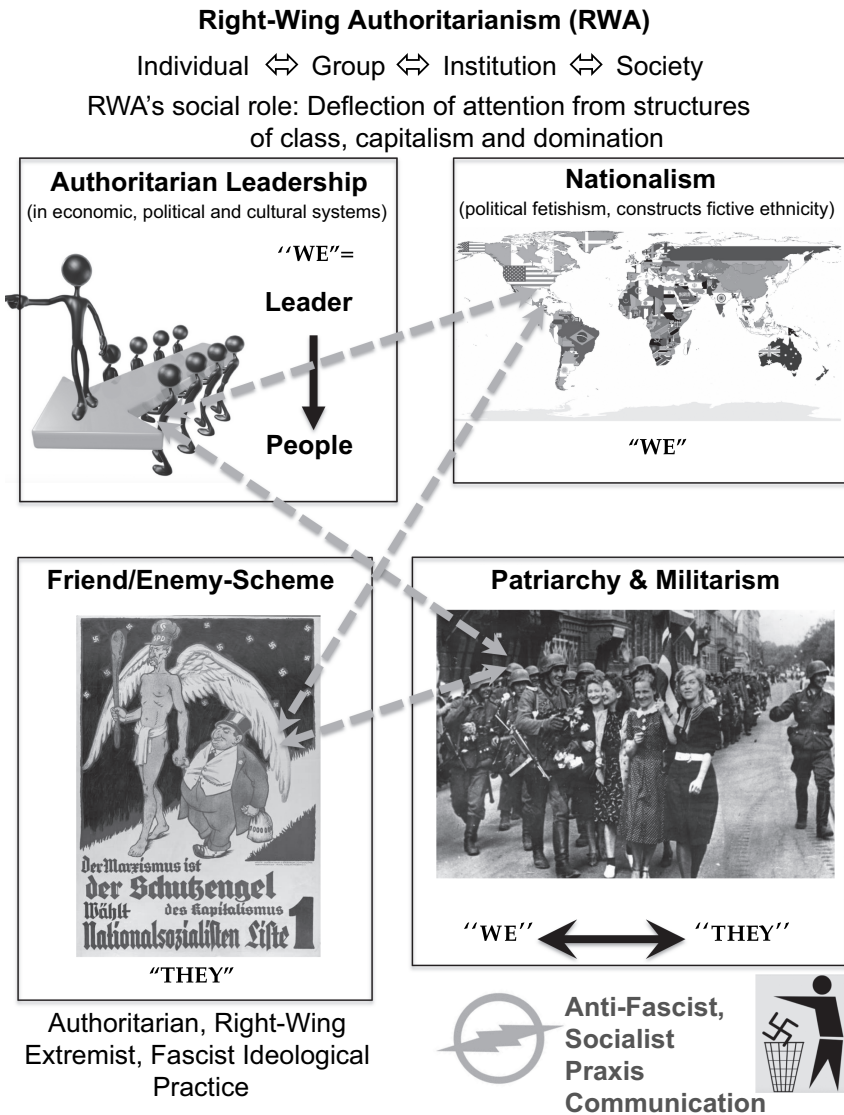
FIGURE 17.1   A model of right-wing authoritarianism.

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 scape-
goating constructed enemies for society's problems and abstracting from these pro-
blems 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. Neumann (1936, 35) 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" (Neumann 1936, 39) 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).

A feature that is missing is that (5) 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 Postone (1980) 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 structures, glorifying the family and using racism as one means of social cohesion" (101). 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*" (105).

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."

(Postone 1980, 114)

The political theorist Daniel Woodley (2010) discusses features of a critical theory of fascism. He builds a critical understanding of fascism on the works of Karl Marx and Moishe Postone (1980, 1993, 2003) 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" (Woodley 2010, 17). Woodley (2010, 76) 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."

(Woodley 2010, 17–18)

17.2 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, and social media 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 socialists and immigrants. The scapegoats that fascist ideology constructs and against whom it agitates online include 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:

- **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.

- **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.

- **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.

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

- **Hypertextual, networked fascism:**
  The World Wide Web is a network 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 social media and fascist ideology and practices spread on mainstream sites and platforms.

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

- **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.

- **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 Tamás (2000) 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's (1941/2017) 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 govern-mental 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" (Fraenkel 1941/2017, xxiii).

Post-fascism utilises all means necessary to destroy 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 op-posed democracy. Contemporary fascism often disguises itself as and claims to be democratic. Classical fascism defined the enemy primarily in terms of race and biology, while contemporary fascism defines the enemy based more 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 organi-sation 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.

What is Digital Fascism?

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.

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