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Message



In the Visayas, security and democracy is strongly contested. On the islands of Negros and Samar, kinetic operations by government security forces against communist rebels continue even as many activists working for progressive civil society formations face serious threats to their civil liberties. The fresh surge of troops plus the Duterte administration's recent policy pronouncement towards a whole-of-government approach in addressing the communist insurgency has turned this region into a new laboratory. The recent military deployment to enforce community quarantine measures in Cebu City depict a trend towards a

securitized approach in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic.

The papers in this volume were put together as part of a forum in place of a lecture-seminar which was supposed to have been held at Silliman University, Dumaguete City on 17 February 2020. Following the seminar's cancellation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the authors agreed to present papers in a web-based seminar (webinar) held last 26 August 2020, and have them published as a Working Paper series. The papers dovetail with the broader theme of the PPSA International Conference (politics in/of/at the margins), for which the Visayas lecture-seminar was supposed to be a forerunner, a practice-run for Visayas-based PPSA members who may not be able to participate physically in the international conference in Iloilo City. The papers cover Samar, Cebu and Negros islands, and discuss distinct security concerns nuanced according to the localities. Dr. Cobbie Palm's paper and my own interrogate the conduct of communist counterinsurgency operations and the local turn against peace as many anti-government elements are recasted as terrorists. Prof. Regletto Imbong's paper echoes the same critical note in the government response to the rise of positive COVID-19 cases in Cebu City.



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As a professional association, we are proud of the scholarship of our regional members and make it a point to provide a platform to showcase these works. This volume is a testament of the resiliency of our academic community, able to go on with the business of creating and connecting even amidst a pandemic.


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The Fascist Regime: The Rise, Development, and Stabilization of Fascism in the Philippines

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Introduction

Contemporary analyses on Duterte depict him as either a populist, illiberal, authoritarian, or a combination of all, but never a fascist. Mark Thompson (2016, 42) argued that Duterte is an illiberal populist who transformed the existing political order into an illiberal one by constructing a "new law-and-order script," forming new strategic groups to eliminate persisting liberal constraints. Nicole Curato (2016, 91) contended what she called a "penal populism" from which Duterte hinges his appeal. Ronald Pernia (2019, 65) examined the intersectionality of populism and human rights and underscored how the populist mobilization of Duterte allowed him to undermine the basic principles of human rights. Carmel Abao (2017, 310) discussed how Duterte's populism is a populist rhetoric product that effectively combined popular mobilization and typical political and institutional supports. And the title of Richard Heydarian's book suggests how Duterte's populist revolt is aimed at elite democracy. Heydarian (2018, 10) claimed that the terrible failure of the post-Marcos elite democracy to deliver its promise of social justice and national development enabled the populist revolt of Duterte.

The dominant analyses that hinge on governmental forms other than fascism somewhat diminish the latter's possibility and danger. While it was mentioned that Duterte has fascist propensities (Pernia 2019, 62) and earlier warned that a fascist movement might soon emerge (Curato, 2016, 91), fascism as a concept and as a possible political phenomenon to unfold under Duterte's regime was not seriously discussed especially in light of contemporary literature and the peculiar contexts of the country. One reason



behind the lack of an academic treatment of Duterte's possible association with fascism is the compounding of fascism with populism. Fascism, for example, is regarded as the "pernicious perversion of populism" (Heydarian, 2018, 2), a phrase that fails to grasp and illuminate the meaning of fascism adequately.

Relative to the dominant analyses of Duterte, Bello's (2017a) portrayal of Duterte as a fascist original is rather distinctive and original. But as laudable as his scholarly interventions could be, his fascism analysis is rather insufficient as it is theoretically anemic. As Ordoñez and Borja (2018, 9) have assessed, his interventions could truly reflect his activist commitment but not contribute to the body of works dedicated to the concept of fascism.

The Philippines has always been the national democratic (ND) left, both the armed and the legal mass movements, that unhesitatingly labeled as fascist past and present semi-colonial regimes. Fascism is discussed in the *Philippine Society and Revolution* of Amado Guerrero (2006, 119-123) as deriving from or is deployed based on bureaucrat capitalism. It specifically illustrated fascism as a regime of a clique of a particular class that is willing to use armed force even against another clique of their class to preserve power. While instructive and contextualized, it left behind serious questions like fascist movements and parties' role in developing fascism in the Philippines.

The significance of theorizing the present regime according to the lens of fascism is threefold. First, it reflects the changing political context from 2016 up to the present. This recognizes that a lot has changed since then, which the notions of populism or illiberalism could not adequately grasp. Second, it provides a framework from which to comprehend the present regime, including the social relations that determine its character. Third, it clarifies the specific response to the present political context.



A Fascist Original: What Fascism is Not

Bello (2017a, 78 and 2017b, 21) underscored four broad characterizations of a fascist leader, which he believed apply unobjectionably to Duterte. First, a fascist is a charismatic leader with a strong inclination toward authoritarian rule. Second, this charismatic leader derives social support from a multilayered social base. Third, his/her authoritarian rule both engages or supports systematic and colossal violations of human rights. Finally, the authoritarian rule of the charismatic leader opposes the values of liberal or social democracy. These characterizations appear to be fundamental characteristics of a fascist ruler. However, upon a closer look, these descriptions characterized by the personalization, de-historicization, and relativization of the concept of fascism are laden with theoretical inconsistencies and practical difficulties.

First, Bello overemphasized characteristics attributable to an individual's character, like personal charisma and individual inclination. This is the personalization of the concept of fascism. His argument line suggested that, since Duterte possesses these qualities, he fits the "F" word (Bello, 2017a, 77). While this kind of reasoning is not new, it is rather obscurantist as it glosses over systemic causes for fascism's unfolding. While Bello (2017a, 79-80 and 2017b, 25-29) established the post-EDSA regimes' debacle as a central explanation to Duterte's success, this, however, succeeded only in outlining the socio-economic and political contexts for Duterte's rise to power but not of fascism itself.

Several thinkers criticized the reduction of fascism to characteristics attributable to an individual. Theodor Adorno (1991, 150-151) did not only deny that psychological dispositions cause fascism but also claim that the methodology behind the supposed psychology of fascism is stimulated by manipulation. Aristotle Kallis (2006, 32) denied that charisma alone is sufficient to develop a fascist regime. Charisma could even be



manufactured through a process of “charismatisation.” Atilio Boron (2019) also criticized the idea that fascism is caused by peculiar characteristics or a political leader's psychology. The personalization of the concept of fascism more often than not results in the same personalization of its supposed solution and the glossing over of socio-economic and political issues behind its development. For example, in the case of Max Horkheimer and Samuel Flowerman (1950, vii), it was believed that fascism could be thwarted through the individual's re-education.

Second, as personal characteristics have become the basis for the constitution of fascism, it then appears that fascism has been there the moment a political leader who fits the “F” term assumed power. The problem with reducing fascism to personal characteristics and inclinations of political leaders is that it de-historicizes the concept, i.e., it both removes it from definite historical conditions that determine its development and dresses it with the semblance of necessity. This is the de-historicization of the concept of fascism.

The de-historicized view would naturally result in an over-evaluation of Duterte and his regime to be an always-already and necessarily fascist one. This position conflicts with the practical dimension of fascism as a regime. For example, the view that a fascist regime has been there all along the moment its ruler fits the “F” word opposes what Poulantzas (1979, 333-335) characterized as a calibrated or gradual rise of fascism within the State apparatuses. While possessing authoritarian ambitions or inclinations, one does not automatically transform the State into a fascist regime (Webber, 2020, 156). Fascism or the fascist is irreducible to the person, for it is always a form of State, the determination of which is based on socio-economic and political conditions.

Third, banking on the idea that fascism today could not assume the same forms as it did in the past, Bello systematically revised and relativized the meaning of the term by



insisting that fascism could work well alongside a capitulationist radical left. This is the relativization of the concept of fascism. This goes against a basic character of fascism. Theoretically, fascism and the socialist doctrines that guide the radical left are incompatible. Fascism's political and ideological principles are highly incompatible with socialist doctrines, especially, for example, on the question of anti-capitalism and the withering away of the state.

Empirically, fascism and the left were also opposed. For Poulantzas (1979, 143-145), it is not the capitulation but the ideological and political weakening of the left that enabled the rise of fascism. Not only are fascism and the radical left opposed, but also their relationship is antagonistic. This will be discussed subsequently. The view that fascism is, in one way or another, an anti-communist movement and ideology is also shared by thinkers like Enzo Traverso (2019, 13, 115-118), Roger Griffin (2007, 321), and Dylan Riley (2018, 16-17).

The Classical Meets the Contemporary: Fascism in a Neoliberal Period

The possibility of fascism cannot be reduced to some personal charisma or individual inclination. Even the presence of obvious authoritarian ambitions still could not constitute fascism. Fascism is a product of a specific ensemble of social relations based on which a particular form of State emerges as a response to a political crisis. The contemporary investigation of the problem of fascism requires the conceptual lens of classical theories and the illumination of contemporary literature and events. In this regard, I attempt to derive a preliminary sketch of just how fascism develops in the Philippines from Poulantzas' classical contribution in dialogue with the equally important contributions of Samir Amin and his interlocutors.



Poulantzas (1979, 11-12) insisted that fascism should be viewed as a specific form of the exceptional State, one that differs from the other exceptional forms such as Bonapartism or military dictatorship. As an exceptional form, the fascist state "corresponds to a political crisis" (12), particularly when monopoly capitalists were still on the road to establish its hegemony, as in the case in Germany and Italy then (Poulantzas 85-88, 108-113, 131-135).

Especially during the beginning of fascism, monopoly capitalists forged temporary and asymmetrical alliances with various classes through the fascist party as it did not have its party representation then. It had to join and support the fascist party's popular movement that secured its mass support and provided the parliamentary means to rule as a class within the State apparatuses. Characteristic during this period was what Poulantzas (73) described as the "crisis of party representation." This referred to the political crisis characterized by the disjunction of the representatives and the represented. The traditional bourgeois parties lost their power of being the medium of representation and governance.

By the time the fascist party gained hegemony, these alliances' nature had changed along with the enlargement of the State's role. The fascist party's role was eventually subordinated, although not totally fused, to the State (112-113 and 134). During the transitional stage, the State assumed an "enlarged" role to facilitate the monopoly capitalist class' process of hegemony (21). The enlarged role of the State refers to its exceptional character when it develops into a dictatorial form to short-circuit the formal processes circumscribed by a given juridical procedure. This short-circuiting is already manifest at the beginning of the rise of fascism when representational ties broke. As the parties lost their organizational representation function, alternative, duplicated, but



hidden parallel networks emerged where communications are channeled and decisions are settled.

Consequently, the State grows in power. As it is displaced with what used to be is the function of the parties (74). As processes were short-circuited, the government, along with its form, was decided not through the parties' medium but immediately within the State apparatuses.

As an exceptional form of the State, fascism mobilizes various State apparatuses as the monopoly capitalists consolidate its political dominance. These apparatuses include both the repressive and the ideological ones, with the objective of suppressing and controlling the other factions and classes whose interests somehow threaten big capital's economic hegemony and political dominance. At work in fascism is the interplay between repression and ideological control, with the latter governing the former. For example, this interplay was obvious between the political police and the modifications of the nature of law and guilt.

Poulantzas (1979, 332) explained that the process of domination, specifically during fascist stabilization, involves a reorganization of the State apparatuses, allowing one of its apparatuses to dominate the rest and the whole State system, including the apparatuses pertaining to ideology. This apparatus, according to Poulantzas (1979, 332), is the political police. As a State apparatus, its importance lies in its execution of political repression and ideological control. With the reorganization of the State apparatuses and the political police's consequent domination, the law's nature was also transformed. The law was believed to be incarnated in the will of the *Führer*. As Adolf Eichmann (quoted by Agamben, 2005, 38) expressed, "the words of the *Führer* have the force of law." For



Poulantzas (1979, 343-343), the political police were seen as the perfect embodiment of the *Führer's* will, which also is the universal will.

Alongside the transformation of the law's nature is the ideological modification of guilt's concept to effectively mobilize the enemy's image. Poulantzas (1979, 343) described that guilt no longer referred to a suspect act or a violation of the law, but a possible enemy. With the transformation of the law's nature, the assignment of guilt is as arbitrary as the execution of the law itself. The image of the enemy is manufactured, mobilized, and exploited to hunt the guilty person. During the Nazi fascist regime, the enemies came from various social groups, from the Jews to the communists, including the beggars, the mad people, and all the other anti-social elements.

As anti-capitalism's appearance in the fascist party slowly faded, thereby undermining its popularity, it needed to mobilize an image to project the enemy's figure. This mobilization of the enemy image was part of an ideological function mainly to secure the fascist State from its supposed destabilizers and reinforce monopolistic capitalists' domination. As the supposed enemies proliferated, the fascists, through its supreme leader, made it their noble obligation to secure the people and the State. Thus, the *Reichstag* Fire Decree of 1933 laid the basis for the cancellation of individual liberties and suppressing all the supposed enemies. Organized repression was unleashed by the political police, governed by the ideological modifications in the law's level, to what the fascists perceived as their enemies. Particularly to the working class, this repression was organized most systematically and had as one of its effects a considerable increase in their exploitation (Poulantzas, 1979, 167). Physical repression, ideological control, and economic exploitation were unleashed and perfected in a single fascist stroke.



Samir Amin's timely theoretical interventions on the reemergence of fascism and the corpus of works that engaged his contributions are illuminating, especially as these articulate the problem of fascism within the neoliberal era and semi-colonial contexts. Amin (2014) cautioned not to lump the various fascist regimes of the past into a single fascism category. But beyond the diversity of these fascisms, Amin (2014) pointed out two common characteristics.

First, these fascisms managed the government and society in such a way that capitalism and its fundamental principles are not undermined and threatened. Amin (2014) described fascism as a particular way of managing capitalism but clothed under anti-capitalist's garments. Echoing Poulantzas, for Amin (2014), fascism appears in specific "conjunctures of violent and deep crisis" where the former could be the best or only solution for the said crisis. Second, fascism is always based on "the categorical rejection of 'democracy.'" A reversal of values enables the domination of constitutionally protected principles and submission to the leader's supposed authority and his/her agents. A third characteristic is deduced by Paris Yeros and Praveen Jha (2020, 89) from Amin's analysis. This will subsequently be elaborated.

Amin's discussion of fascism should be seen against the background of his rich critique of imperialism or what Poulantzas, also called monopoly capitalism. He traced and paralleled two periods of capitalist crisis and drew out remarkable points. The first crisis ranged from 1873-1990. Shortly after industrial capitalism's triumph, its profit rates dropped. Amin (2011, 4 and 2009) explained that capital responded both by concentration and globalized expansion. As capital concentrated in large monopolies, decreasing or eliminating competition, it extracted, on top of its profits, monopoly rent imposed on the high added value products generated by labor exploitation (Amin, 2019). The policy of colonial conquest was likewise reinforced. These, according to Amin (2011,



4 and 2009), established new structures that consequently provided the basis for the surge of capitalist profits and led to the pre-war *belle époque* (1890-1914). This period saw the domination of financial monopoly capital on a global scale.

The second crisis started in 1971, marked by the abandonment of the dollar's gold convertibility and stretches even until today. Amin (2011, 4 and 2009) argued how, just like in the first period of the crisis, this period also saw the collapse of the profit rates along with investment levels and growth rates. These rates were never again able to return to the levels of the 1945-1975 period. Similarly, capital responded both by concentration and globalization. New structures, encapsulated in the term neoliberalism (Yeros and Jha, 2020, 82), resulted from the responses and defined the second *belle époque* (1990-2008). This period started a new politics of the monopolies that were, unlike the first period's plural imperialisms, structured according to violent competition politics. This time is structured according to the Triad's collective imperialism (the US, Europe, and Japan). Just as the Great Depression of 1930 was but a product of the first period of capitalist crisis, the financial meltdown of 2008 was but a result of the second period. For Amin (2011, 5 and 2009), the crisis is not merely financial but systemic as there has been a long-term decline of profit rates in the capitalist system (Yeros and Jha, 2020, 80).

Aside from the parallelisms between the two periods' nature of the crisis, response, and the resulting *belles époques* and monopolistic structures, Amin (2011, 4-5 and 2009) also noted that both wars and revolutions characterize the two periods. However, what Amir failed to note in these parallelisms is fascism's occurrence within this systemic crisis. Since fascism, for Amin (2014), appears in specific "conjunctures of violent and deep crisis," its occurrence could be seen as inherently embedded within the specific conjunctures of the permanent crisis of imperialism itself. It is worthy to note that the fascism of the interwar



period belonged to or was produced by the first period of the capitalist crisis. Today, in the period of the second crisis, neoliberalism is put in stasis as a result of its crisis (Patnaik, 2020, 41-42 and Shivji, 2020, 15-17). If the crisis of the first period produced the Great Depression of 1930 and the fascisms of the interwar period, the second period's crisis created the financial crisis of 2008 and the fascisms of the neoliberal period.

Furthermore, since a response to the capitalist crisis also includes globalized expansion, fascism has an inherent link to the crisis and the policy of colonization, neo-colonization, or semi-colonization. Semi-colonialism could either be understood as a "transitional form" that tends towards full colonial takeover or an instance of intense financial dependence. The case of a debt-ridden Philippines is an example of the latter.

Semi-colonies are subjected to the most brutal forms of primitive accumulation with constant military intervention and unequal treaties (Yeros and Jha, 2020, 88). According to Yeros and Jha (2020, 89-90), fascism is an imperialist force for world domination. They further touched on the issue of just how peripheral fascism reinforces imperialism today. While peripheral fascism in a semi-colony does not have the conditions to vie for world domination, it nevertheless aligns itself with monopoly capital at the center for its survival, thus "becoming an instrument in the drive for world domination (90)." This also explains why fascism in semi-colonies is so committed to neoliberalism in its economics.

The Walking Time Bomb: The Neoliberal Crisis and the Pandemic

Neoliberalism is characterized by trade liberalization, privatization, deregulation, and denationalization, policies that gradually unfolded throughout the '80s and the '90s (Sison, 2008 and Bello, 2004, 12-15; Bello, 2017a, 27-28). These policies reflected the country's semi-colonial conditions as these control the latter's fiscal policies, trade, employment capacities, and other economic activities. While semi-colonialism is



irreducible to economic, the discussion of semi-colonialism's extent in the country is limited to economics, particularly of the contemporary effects of the neoliberal restructuring.

Since its implementation, the Philippine economy has been hit hard by the permanent neoliberalism (Martinez 2020; Batalla, 2016, 169; Bello 2004, 22-24; San Juan, 2011, 11). The pandemic exacerbates this crisis. As a result of unequal neoliberal trade, the trade deficit from 2014-2018 has been alarmingly growing in an average of 76.5% (Rappler, 2019a), narrowing only when imports slowed down as a result of global lockdowns (Reuters, 2020). Unfortunately, export sales from January-June 2020 have plunged to a combined loss of USD 28.4 billion, a decrease of 17.8% from the USD 34.6 billion export sales of the same period in 2019 (De Vera, 2020).

Foreign and local debts have continued to balloon, especially during the pandemic, which already breached Php 9 trillion (Lopez, 2020). The Duterte regime has already acknowledged a fiscal deficit in 2017 and vowed to introduce measures to raise additional revenues while lowering corporations' income tax rates from 30% to 25% (Public-Private Partnership Center, 2016). As the regime continues to contract local and foreign debts in the face of the pandemic's challenges, it proposes new sources of revenues, especially from digital platforms (Robles, 2020), measures that would hardly hit the already suffering middle, and lower classes. Debt servicing has undermined the fiscal capacity of the regime, has burdened to the poor the task of generating higher revenues, and has limited its capacity to invest in public utilities and social services, especially in health.

Neoliberalism's drive for liberalized trades has continually undermined the capacities of the agriculture sector. From 2010-2019, its employment capacity decreased by 11.4% (DTI, 2018; PSA, 2020a), notwithstanding the accumulated decreases since the '80s. This



expresses a declining employment capacity of the sector and a worsening rice and other crop production insufficiency. Meanwhile, the highly precarious and flexible work of construction dominated half of the industry sector's total employment capacity (PSA, 2020b), corresponding to Duterte's import-dependent "build, build, build" program. And from this bulk of precariously employed workers would come the pandemic-driven unemployment of the country. While unemployment was recorded at 4.7 million in 2019 (Ibon, 2020a), this ballooned to a record high of 20.4 million as a result of rigid and long lockdowns (Ibon, 2020b). And with companies shutting due to economic losses, the promise of employment and economic recovery is still far from being true. The Duterte regime is facing the worst economic crisis brought about by the pandemic as it braces for an economic recession, resulting from a 16.5% drop in the gross domestic product (Dela Cruz and Morales, 2020). Under neoliberalism, the Philippine economy is a walking time bomb waiting for a catastrophic trigger for its destructive explosion. This time, it is the pandemic that triggered an unprecedented explosion.

The Fascist Turn

In understanding the current regime's fascism, periods have to be defined since, for Poulantzas (1979, 66), fascism does not come out of the blue. These stages are the rise, development, and stabilization of Duterte's fascism. The rise (late 2017) took place shortly after the regime abandoned the peace process, with the radical left officially vilified as its enemy. This period is characterized by the introduction and persecution of the enemy image. The development (2018-2020) happened from the consolidation of power up to the reorganization of State apparatuses. This period is characterized by actual processes of political consolidation while continuing the campaigns of the previous period. The stabilization (2020) was guaranteed after the regime successfully exploited the pandemic to reorganize the State apparatuses supposedly to respond to the crisis. This is



characterized by the reorganization of the State apparatuses and furthering the campaigns of the previous periods.

It is no less than Duterte (Analysis, 2017) himself who admitted that he is a fascist. This signaled the period of the rise of fascism. Shortly after the peace talks collapse with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), he threateningly admitted that he is a fascist and determined to categorize the NDFP as its enemy, a terrorist. It is worthy to note that such a collapse took place when the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the NDFP were doing exploratory talks, especially concerning the Comprehensive Agreement for Socio-Economic Reforms (CASER). The CASER was considered the meat of the negotiations, for it supposedly addresses the armed communist rebellion's root causes. It proposes genuine agrarian reform and national industrialization as the cornerstones for socio-economic development (Imbong, 2019, 69). In other words, it is an essentially anti-neoliberal alternative that, when implemented, radically alters the existing social relations dominated by the landed and comprador classes. It would likewise challenge the semi-colonial order perpetuated by monopoly capital. No less than Duterte's trusted generals attacked CASER as a framework that supposedly serves the Reds' interests and is obsolete (Parrocha and Arcilla, 2020; and Galvez, 2020). The rise of the fascist regime is signaled not only by Duterte's admission but also by the contradiction between the regime's adherence to the neoliberal order and the radical left's persistence in implementing socio-economic reforms whose fundamental tenets are anti-neoliberal. This contradiction represents the class struggle between monopoly capital and its local class collaborators of the landed and comprador classes on the one hand, and the peasants, workers, and all the progressive forces of the Philippine society represented by the NDFP on the other. Through the Duterte regime, the latter, threatened by the anti-neoliberal alternatives of the NDFP, resorted to a fascist turn.



A condition for the rise of Duterte's fascism was the severance of ties and all-out antagonism against the radical left, be it the armed or the unarmed movement. Losing the appearance of authenticity, which it could only invoke when it supposedly opens its ears to the radical left's demands, it projects to the radical left not only its failures but its manufactured enemy image: the terrorist. Sison (2020, personal interview) explained that terrorism as a category had been the *bête noire* (black beast) that the most reactionary and fascist regimes have been using as a pretext for their systematic targeting. Unswerving with its adherence to the neoliberal (dis)order and its loyalty to the class that supported its campaign and presidency (Bueza, 2016), the Duterte regime shifted its campaign of suppression to the supposed terrorist radical left. The anti-terrorist rhetoric significantly weaves and effectively supports the fascist regime's entirety, narrowing such rhetoric to what, according to Yeros and Jha (2020, 85), is described as a genuine challenge to monopoly capitalism, the radical left.

After its rise, fascism developed through the institution of mechanisms that narrowly targeted the radical left and introduced forms of control to various public and private institutions. The need to consolidate power was ever more pressing as the midterm elections were nearing. Throughout the development of fascism, the regime consolidated its political power as it secured control over the judiciary and the legislative branches of the government. In the former's case, it had already ousted Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno through a *quo warranto* petition last 2018. In the former's case, the regime was able to secure domination when it succeeded in fielding its allies to the upper house after it won the midterm elections marred by allegations of fraud and violence (Rappler, 2019b). The regime also constantly harassed opposition lawmakers from the Liberal Party and the Makabayan Bloc.



The consolidation process was masterfully implemented through the institutionalization of the whole-of-nation approach to end the local communist armed conflict or the Executive Order (EO) 70 series of 2018. This was the initial step to consolidate political power through the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC); most of its composition is dominated by the security sector notorious for reported human rights violations. This was implemented months before the midterm elections.

In the EO 70, the security sector mobilized State resources to advance its narrow counterinsurgency and anti-activism campaigns and unleash a crackdown against perceived State enemies (Africa, 2019). The EO 70 provided the basis for a systematic attack against groups and individuals highly critical of the regime and its neoliberal policies. On various occasions, personalities of the NTF-ELCAC were reported to have red-tagged legitimate people's organizations, non-government organizations (NGOs), church denominations and workers, lawyers, media, and other progressive groups as being fronts of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

In Cebu, two NGOs, the Central Visayas Farmers Development Center (FARDEC) and Community Empowerment Resource Network (CERNET), were red-tagged by Gen. Ruben Basiao as communist fronts (Cepeda, 2019). FARDEC, for example, is known for its advocacies for genuine agrarian reform. Recently, it became critical of the Duterte regime because the latter enacted the neoliberal rice tariffication law. In an interview with the Executive Director of FARDEC Patrick Gerard Torres, he noted how the present regime contrasts with the previous ones. In terms of the scope of the attacks, this time, it is not only the partner people's organizations of the NGO but the NGO itself that is being attacked. He explained how the State mobilized the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to restrict non-stock and non-profit organizations' accreditation



through the SEC memo 2018-15. The memo supposedly protects these organizations from money laundering and terrorist financing. However, Torres argued that it is a form of control and surveillance against NGOs advocating for progressive change. The said memo was subsequently amended after a series of dialogues between networks of non-profit organizations and the SEC. In terms of aggressiveness, the State, through the NTF-ELCAC, is more aggressive in its vilification campaign as it conducted foreign travels to discourage foreign funders from funding NGOs allegedly fronts of the CPP.

Around this period in Cebu, a broad democratic front *Stop the Attacks* was established by activists, development workers, church people, and people's organizations from all over the Visayas to respond to the increasing attacks in Negros, Samar, Panay, and other provinces of the region. Bishop Gerardo Alminaza of the Diocese of San Carlos, Negros Occidental, became the said network's lead convenor.

The red-tagging campaign of the State victimized even members of the academe. In the University of the Philippines Cebu, the campus's façade was vandalized with "CPP-NPA *Salot*" last 29 March 2019 in time for the anniversary of the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the CPP. This was followed by a series of death threats and red-tagging to the officers of the All UP Academic Employees Union (AUPAEU) Cebu Chapter. Former AUPAEU Cebu President Phoebe Zoe Maria Sanchez received a series of death threats after reportedly being red-tagged on various platforms. The current President of the academic union Regletto Aldrich Imbong was also red-tagged in an online platform shared even by police and military offices and headquarters. The Vice-President for the Faculty of the academic union was trailed and apprehended by a plainclothes officer for supposedly wearing a Mao cap. In the University of San Carlos (USC), elements of the Philippine Army bringing long firearms were seen entering the campus last September 2019. In an interview with Mari Elise Gwyneth Lim, the spokesperson for the Rise for



Education USC, she assailed the entry of the armed State elements as it came days after a series of protests against tuition fees increases and the no permit no exam policy. Their social media platforms were soon red-tagged and attacked by online trolls after condemning the said intrusion.

The NTF-ELCAC also encroached on virtually every government agency that mattered, and its control reached from the regional down to the barangay level nationwide (Africa, 2019). In Central Visayas, a corresponding regional taskforce was likewise formed. The RTF-ELCAC commended the 126 out of 136 LGUs in the region for having passed resolutions declaring the CPP-NPA as *persona non grata*. In Cebu City, Mayor Edgardo Labella formed his local task force (Palaubsanon and Chua, 2019) despite the entire province having long been declared as insurgency-free. It is obvious that the target of such task forces is the legal movement of the radical left. In one of his meetings with governors and mayors, Duterte reminded them of his efforts, including his counterinsurgency campaign, and threatened them should they not deliver (Talabong, 2019). Such control is further formalized through the Department of Interior and Local Government's (DILG) memorandum number 2018-211, prohibiting LGUs from supporting supposed left-wing rebel groups.

Unlike in Europe's interwar fascisms, fascism in the Philippines smoothly develops even in the absence of a fascist movement or a party. While the *Kilusang Pagbabago* was supposedly organized as a social base of grassroots support for the regime, it was short-lived and has not mobilized in masses the regime's supposed supporters. Existing today are virtual networks of paid trolls tasked to hype the declining popularity of the regime (Matsuzawa, 2017; and Story and Billing, 2020). Also absent is a fascist party instrumental for the installation of the regime.



However, the Philippines' peculiar institutional-legal context smoothly enables rather than obstructs the rise, development, and stabilization of fascism. Aceron (2009, 5 and 11) asserted how, through a presidential system of election, the chief executive gets to amass enormous power to the point of rendering parties nominal, making them "temporary political alliances," and placing them subjects to the presidential pork. There is an inverse process in the Philippines, where, instead of the party determining a government platform, it is rather the president who does so on the parties' behalf (Aceron, 2009, 11). This consequently weakens the legislature as it is held captive to the power of the chief executive. Perennially characteristic in the Philippines is what Poulantzas described as the mere effect of breaking representational ties, the short-circuiting of political processes. As the short-circuiting of political processes has become the norm that structures the institutional-legal context of the Philippines. As the short-circuiting of the political process, for Poulantzas, constitutes the rise of fascism, the country is always vulnerable to fascist regimes.

Further, the fascist party, as illustrated by Poulantzas, was merely an instrument for monopoly capitalism's political dominance. But since today marks not a transitional but a period of neoliberal hegemony, fascism can dispense with the fascist party's instrumental role. Even in the case of the German and Italian fascisms, the party was later on subordinated while functioning in the propagation of fascist ideology. Big businesses need not channel their financial support to a party as the chief executive can obviously subvert the latter. In this case, the president is the concrete expression of the landed-comprador class rule, and the financial support is crucial for a money-driven presidential poll. Also, what the virtual network of paid trolls is doing today fulfills the task of ideological battle on behalf of a fascist party. Noticeable, for example, is how the paid army of trolls deflected criticism of the regime's handling of the pandemic crisis (Story and Billing, 2020).



From the period of fascist development characterized by consolidation of power, fascism is stabilized through a reorganization of the State apparatuses. As Poulantzas explained, this reorganization particularly allows the political police's domination as an apparatus of repression and ideological control. In the Philippines, such a function is assumed by the military and the police's combined force.

While Duterte has been known for surrounding himself and appointing military and police generals into his cabinet, these elements of the security sector gained enormous power by the time the military-dominated National Task Force for COVID-19 was established to oversee, implement, and monitor the governmental response towards the pandemic. It controlled various government agencies and LGUs. For a time, Cebu City was under Gen. Roy Cimatu after it became the country's epicenter of the pandemic. And throughout the quarantine period, a martial law-like response, with tanks and law enforcers in camouflage patrolling the streets, was implemented in the City, especially in barangays where cases of infection were high.

In this fascist stabilization, the law became the arbitrary execution of the military and the police. In fact, the mere invocation of Duterte's *name*, as Police General Archie Gamboa has warned (Luna, 2020), is enough to conduct warrantless arrests of supposed unruly quarantine violators. The same as with Eichmann, for the Philippine police and military, the *president's name* has the force of law. This consequently resulted in systematic attacks, including those groups from the radical left.

In Cebu, eight activists were arrested last 05 June 2020 after they peacefully protested against the Anti-Terror Bill's passing then. During the Independence Day Celebration, the police conducted checkpoint operations around the vicinity of UP Cebu and stationed more than thirty riot police officers to supposedly thwart another planned mobilization of



militant groups in UP Cebu. Peasant activists in Aloguinsan, Cebu, who joined an online protest action during the fourth State of the Nation Address of Duterte, were apprehended and harassed by police elements in their community. Finally, a staff of the FARDEC Elena Tijamo, known for advocating sustainable development, was abducted from her home last 13 June 2020.

Outside Cebu, personalities from the radical left who have long been red-tagged by the State were assassinated. The latest of these was the killing of Zara Alvarez, a human rights advocate from Bacolod City, Negros Occidental. While the radical left is systematically attacked during the fascist stabilization, this by no means suggests that the attacks are limited to the former. Data in mid-April revealed that nearly thirty thousand quarantine violators have already been arrested (Santos, 2020). In times of crisis and instability, the State has to portray its strength to repress and control the citizenry. What is rather alarming in this situation is that the terrorist or the red concept as the enemy is virtually extended to include ordinary civilians and even the ABS-CBN (Macaraeg, 2020). In his 07 July 2020 speech (Duterte, 2020), Duterte, in a threatening tone, ambiguously equated "destroying the government" as a terrorist act. This took place when an overly sensitive and intolerant regime identifies constitutionally guaranteed criticisms as already destroying the government.

Yet the epitome of this fascist stabilization is the legalization of arbitrariness itself. This is signaled by the enactment of the Anti-Terrorism Law (ATL). In it are provisions that are vague and susceptible to abuse and accord yet enormous powers to the military and the police in the identification, surveillance, and arrest of supposed terrorists. Senator Panfilo Lacson suggested lifting the toothless Martial Law (ML) in Mindanao once a stronger anti-terror law is passed (Santos, 2019), implying how the ATL is a *de facto* yet empowered ML. As Sison (2020, personal interview) pointed out, the ATL gets rid of the Bill of Rights



and is worse than the 1972 proclamation of ML. The regime's fascist stabilization need not, at least initially, declare a *de jure* ML. The regime does this for pragmatic reasons. As the memory of the ML reminisces historical collective trauma, it cannot risk a collective anamnesis on the part of the people by triggering their historical memory through ML's declaration. To achieve the ML aims without declaring one, the substance of which simply has to assume another legal form, the ATL. However, this does not prevent the regime from declaring one, especially if the Supreme Court decides unfavorably against the ATL.

The fascist stabilization heightens the ideological control of the regime. Aside from hyping the online troll campaigns, it shut down the largest media outlet in the country, the ABS-CBN. While alternative media outfits have been cyber-attacked during the period of fascist development (Barreiro, 2019) and over a hundred attacks against journalists have been recorded (Talabong, 2019), the regime intensifies its attacks against institutions that somehow showed what Poulantzas (1979, 306) described as a relatively autonomous ideological sub-system, one that could assert independence relative to the dominant state ideology.

The regime does so on the pretext of fighting oligarchy. Fascism conveniently dresses anti-capitalist garments to conceal its naked bias towards a preferred faction of the ruling class. In the case of the ABS-CBN, Duterte (Rey, 2019) has been suggesting the network's sale. And the regime's supposed anti-oligarchic tirades rather singled out business elites known for their ties with the opposition Liberal Party (Heydarian, 2019). In fact, Duterte admitted to not hesitating to help "helpful friends" get richer (Ranada, 2020), perhaps the same friends that helped him during the presidential campaign (Bueza, 2016). Scrutinizing the list of these helpful friends reveals that they mainly come from the landed and comprador classes, some of whom, like the Floirendos, are cronies of the fascist Marcos regime. From a teleological perspective, Duterte's fascist turn was a decision to



further consolidate the power of the landed and comprador classes through fascist means.

On top of this bias towards a preferred faction of the ruling classes is the regime's neoliberal commitment to foreign and local borrowings, which today breached Php 9 trillion. During fascist stabilization, the regime suppresses the ruling class's faction in favor of its preferred faction while maintaining the entire neoliberal (dis)order. As the global economic outlook gets dimmer as a result of the pandemic, with a forecasted 5.2% contraction in global GDP (The World Bank, 2020), neoliberalism requires strengthened States to secure and manage its rule vis-à-vis the growing dissatisfaction of the people. The present regime is a case of peripheral fascism that reinforces neoliberalism.

Given the foregoing arguments, it can be said that fascism in the Philippines is a specific form of State that reinforces the neoliberal order and the ruling classes that support and is supported by that order. Despite or precisely because of the absence of a fascist movement or party, and because of the country's peculiar institutional-legal context, fascism rises, develops, and stabilizes smoothly in specific conjunctures of the neoliberal crisis in response to the intensifying mass democratic movement. Fascism thrives through the mobilization of State resources against a manufactured enemy, the section that genuinely threatens the neoliberal order, the radical left.

Conclusion

The paper pointed out how the concept of fascism is born out of specific conjunctures of class struggle and crisis and not of some personal characteristics or inclinations. It argued how fascism is a specific form of State that manages neoliberalism through the most anti-democratic order. It further explained how neoliberalism and semi-colonialism are conditions of fascism in the Philippines and how the latter likewise reinforces



neoliberalism. The struggle for fascism is not only a struggle for democracy. As the permanent crisis of neoliberalism produces fascism, its overcoming is also aimed against the neoliberal order's roots. For as long as the crisis continues, fascism continually recurs. As the book of Amin (2011) suggested, it is not so much the ending of the crisis of capitalism as ending capitalism itself that would thwart the occurrence of fascism. For this to be possible, a broad united democratic and anti-imperialist front is required to overcome both fascism and neoliberalism. This, and only this, is the requirement for fascism never to return.

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