A Critical Ethnography of Facebook

by

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Declaration

I declare that the dissertation, which I hereby submit for the degree *MSocSci Anthropology* at the University of Pretoria, is my own original work and has not been submitted by me for a degree at another university. Where secondary material is used, this has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with University requirements. I am aware of University and implications regarding plagiarism.

I declare no conflict of interest in the submission of this dissertation and I received no financial compensation of this work or views expressed herein.

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Abstract

Facebook has created an unprecedented form of mediated information consumption. Its stated goal is to make online and offline interactions more 'social'. I examine various aspects of what this might mean, using questionnaires, focus groups and interviews as well as extensive online participant observation and ethnography. Beginning with an analysis of online activism and protest dating back as far as 2011 that manifested only online, I then move to an analysis of the recent #FeesMustFall protests as a lens to investigate the use of Facebook by this 'real world' protest movement. I examine how and why Facebook is trying to monopolise various aspects of interpersonal online and mediated communication, and theorise how in doing so Facebook creates a state of visibility which echoes Foucault's invocation of Bentham's panopticon. I then investigate how Facebook can be habitus (Bourdieu) and through this naturalisation and ubiquity be a vehicle of consumerist hegemony, especially with the concept of the 'personal brand'. This raises questions of the productive tensions that arise when the concepts such as visibility, attention, popularity and privacy collide. I unpack this notion with reference to what can be seen as recent fetishization of privacy by Facebook. All leading to an investigation of what the dynamics of this 'attention economy' could mean, as South African young adults experience it.

Keywords: activism, alienation, attention, consumerism, economy, exclusion, Facebook, fetish, Foucault, Gramsci, hegemony, internet, Marx, media, panopticon, perception, politics, private, protest, public, social, students, surveillance, visibility

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Chapter 1: Public Introductions

This is a dissertation in pursuit of a Master's Degree in social Anthropology. When my research began in 2015, my research questions were intentionally of a generalised nature. From the start of the research process Facebook was identified as a company whose business is the collection of data and analysis of such data. Hence my intention was not to ask formal research questions, and collect and analyse quantitative data to answer such questions, but rather to use critical theory in order to develop an understanding of what power dynamics might lie below the surface of Facebook, and how these dynamics affect social interactions, and hence develop a nuanced understanding of something that has been thoroughly normalised.

The overarching idea of the investigation of Facebook was to move from ideas of Facebook presence, posts and communication as 'public' towards ideas of what is 'private' or 'private property' and why this is so.

The dissertation is divided into six chapters, including the current one. The remainder of this chapter introduces the research project and suggests possible ways in which Facebook may be considered public, through the example of my experience of the site. It also suggests why the notion of such public visibility has become a myth, been segmented and diminished, or perhaps was always only an illusion. "The boundaries of the public sphere are not fixed but expand and contract over time" (Davenport et al. 2005:161). So the public sphere in a poststructuralist critique is not one place or 'sphere', but rather a contestation between various 'publics', i.e. a contestation for attention.

The following two chapters concern protest, and protest is perhaps the most public of expressions, so apart from providing a general introduction to my research project, I look at the question of in what ways Facebook is public and in what ways it is not public, or is only semi-public? As a Facebook member one has the ability to post 'publicly' on Facebook: what this means is that in theory anyone can view this post if they go to your Facebook profile – without having to add you as a 'friend'[1].

I start by looking at protest and activism manifested on the site. I then move on to a discussion regarding what the structure of the site may mean and how its meteoric rise in popularity may

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[1]Connections are made on Facebook, through the adding of other people as 'friends', this means that whatever such individuals post on Facebook then appears in one's *newsfeed* – the front page where one is provided with a stream of 'news' from one's friends, as well as advertising. The adding of a 'friend' involves one person adding another as a 'friend', and that person accepting the altered status. One can also 'follow' someone else, which means that one does not add them as a friend, but rather one is updated on the public posts that he/she makes. The act of 'following' is usually applied to someone with a degree of celebrity status.

constitute a notion of 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1977). I then argue that this allows Facebook to monopolise 'social' communication and the internet. I move on to an analysis of emerging concepts such as the attention or 'like' economy and privacy fetishism, and how these relate to the research data which I obtained. Finally, I look at questions that arise regarding how the use of the site might constitute a form of exploitative labour.

Methodology

During the course of my research project, which was conducted over about two years during 2015 and 2016, I do however refer to events outside of this timeframe with regards to online protest, I administered a trial questionnaire to 30 respondents (whose ages ranged from 22 to 45 years) and a more in-depth questionnaire to 191 respondents (whose ages ranged from 19 to 26 years). When I later present quantitative findings, such findings pertain to the data obtained from the more in-depth second questionnaire. I facilitated five semi-formal focus group discussions, with 15, 7, 10, 4 and 5 people respectively participating in the focus groups. I conducted numerous informal and semi-formal one-on-one interviews, from which I derived a great deal of qualitative data. Participation in the questionnaire study was completely voluntary, participants were under absolutely no obligation to answer any of questions contained in the questionnaire. Furthermore, all of the data presented in this dissertation is presented anonymously. When I report on data associated with particular respondents, I use pseudonyms to ensure that respondents' anonymity is ensured.

In terms of online ethnography, I used my own Facebook identity to collect data. I occasionally include screen-shots of posts and messages from Facebook. These were all completely public posts, and so they were in the public domain. Where possible I informed the 'friend' of the use of such posts in the study, and I received no objections to such use. On a number of occasions, always with full informed consent, I observed respondents as they viewed their Facebook pages on either desktop or laptop computers, or on mobile smart phones.

While I conducted two surveys using questionnaires, and utilised online and offline ethnographic observation and interviews to collect data, I also examined Facebook from the perspective of young South African adults, rather than attempting to understand young South African adults through the lens of Facebook. In doing so I hope "to develop a platform critique that is sensitive to its technical infrastructure whilst giving attention to the social and economic implications of the platform" (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013: 1349).

In terms of online ethnography, I do not regard Facebook as a distinct sphere from everyday communication or identity construction. I argue that Facebook has been socially naturalised, arguably more so than is true of 'the internet', insofar as for younger respondents Facebook has become synonymous with internet engagement and with social engagement, despite the fact that, as I argue throughout this dissertation, Facebook creates a particular definition of what 'the social' might mean.

There was an interesting 'strangeness' in engaging in 'traditional' ethnography, compounded by the reflexivity of this particular project, since I had to remove myself and become an observer with respect to something which I had uncritically accepted as a component of social life. I do not see a study of Facebook as 'online ethnography'. Facebook is not necessarily designed to be viewed as an online space, but rather as a social reflection or tool an augmentation of offline social life rather than as much of the research literature which views 'digital ethnography' as concerning something separate from 'real' tangible existence. My focus groups revealed that many respondents had witnessed Facebook having a major influence on how interpersonal relationships evolved, one respondent reported on a friend of hers, who *met* the man that she would eventually marry when he sent her a friend request, because they had mutual friends, but had never actually met. For me Facebook had always been a component of social existence, without a distinction needing to be made between online and offline life. Facebook has always been an institution contingent on offline social connectivity, but in a strangely dissociated way.

In removing myself from this sociality and viewing it solely as an object I came to realise the extent to which this form of sociality creates its own specificities. Removing oneself and seeing it 'from the outside' created its own set of problems, as my respondents did not necessarily perceive Facebook as the object about which I was trying to theorise. Instead a few saw it as an irremovable part of their everyday existence, and the question of "why am I interviewing them personally if the focus of my research was on Facebook itself". At other times, particularly when they perceived aspects of Facebook as problematic, Facebook could become an object with its own disagreeable sense of agency, intruding on interpersonal relationships. Such perceptions seemed generally to be understood as personal grievances, or grievances shared with one or two others. There was often a sense of irony to instances where individuals or small groups disagree with Facebook, a sense of apathy and cool cynicism as Facebook is perceived to be a 'natural fact of life'.

However, what was striking was the way in which Facebook was not an 'online' space, but rather a contingent extension and representation of offline performance. It was not seen as having its own specificities, but rather as being a naturalised embodiment of one's own actions. This made the idea of 'online ethnography' rather meaningless, as no distinction seemed to be made by my respondents between online and offline, especially as the Facebook application is now generally available on most individuals' phones, in their pockets or bags.

However, Facebook is a space in and of itself with its own boundaries and borders, its own 'insides' and 'outsides'. There is an obvious distinction in engaging in ethnography in this digital space. For

example, often I felt that in observing I became distinctly aware of my own invisibility for the people I was observing. To just observe in this way did not feel like participant observation, and it is so normalised, as well as temporally disconnected, that the idea of 'participating' in something specific or meaningful became difficult to comprehend. This was immediately challenged by the way in which there is such mass acceptance and use of the site, even though many of my respondents seem indifferent to it, or "did not like it". My questions about the site and certain dynamics within it led me to places where I would not usually go. This might not seem like a problem, but over time it became very clear that engagement with Facebook is contingent on the individual (the individual as the centre of one's own social engagement), and that in looking for collectivity 'from the outside' one might never discover it. That is not to say that I observed a specific collectivity. In my experience one is not encouraged to regard Facebook in this way; those who were favourably disposed to the site saw it as a reflection of their world, and were at times oblivious to the fact that different people have varying experiences of Facebook, depending on the 'data points[2]' that they provide to the site. Collectivities do exist, and are often reflected on Facebook often in fleeting moments of collectivity, but in my experience the technical mechanisms of the site seemed to divide people rather than to bring them together. This idea, as well as suggested reasons for it, are dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Having said that and perhaps because of reflexivity, seeing it as an object created its own challenges for me. I had to compel myself to objectify what had once seemed to me to be a social fact, I had to try and theorise about something, which as I investigated further, started to engender its own contradictions. Such contradictions had not been apparent to me until I embarked on this research project. I had to remind myself of the distinction between online and offline life, in order to examine the online participation of my respondents, which in and of itself created distance between myself and my respondents. Such distance was difficult to achieve, because it meant distancing myself from my respondents and from my own life in order to re-examine it using a critical lens.

A quick note before I continue: when in this chapter I speak of the 'social' I am referring to a naturalised myth which Facebook has constructed (Bucher, 2015: 1):

> The social is not a thing or domain of reality; it does not explain, it is precisely what needs explaining. This is remarkably easy to forget, as social media platforms constantly suggest the opposite, take the social for granted, naturalize it, make the social equal happiness, inclusion, the good life.

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[2]These data points could be aspects such as name, age, sex, location, what pages have been 'liked', and even web movement outside Facebook.

I recognise 'the social' as a problematic construct when examining social media, and Facebook, in particular, has its own conception of the term.

In the next section I describe the history of Facebook in South Africa from my point of view. Facebook was officially launched in 2004, but in South Africa most people only joined it around 2007 (65% of my respondents were in this category – with the majority of the rest joining later).

Genesis

Facebook is an online social networking company, and is an example of social media. The internet now enables almost immediate communication across vast distances. This is seen not only as thoroughly normal, but is now even regarded as a right, with the UN declaring in a report that unhindered access to the internet is a basic human right (La Rue, 2011). Social networks such as Facebook take up much of the online time of many students at the University of Pretoria. Furthermore, access to Facebook is now possible almost anywhere on most mobile phones. "Thirteen million South Africans now on Facebook, with 10 million, or 77 per cent, using it on mobile devices. Smartphones are used by 7,9 million South Africans to access Facebook" (*South African Social Media Landscape 2016: Executive Summary,*) This makes South Africa what is known as a 'mobile first' country, meaning that people are more likely to access the internet on mobile devices such as smart cell phones than on computers.

Facebook began in 2004 as the brainchild of Mark Zuckerberg, and was initially known as *The Facebook*. In 2003, prior to Facebook, Zuckerberg had created a website while at Harvard called *Facesmash*, which consisted of an application which placed two pictures of Harvard students side by side and asked visitors to the site to rate which one was 'hotter'. Zuckerberg hacked Harvard 'facebooks' to obtain the pictures without seeking permission from the individual students or from the university. At that time at Harvard 'facebooks' were collections of pictures of all the students staying in various dormitories, enabling resident students to know who was staying in adjacent rooms, and what they looked like (Schonfeld 2008:[o][3]).

Facebook started to gain popularity in South Africa as an online social network towards the end of 2006 and during 2007. Globally at that stage it seemed to be a somewhat 'trendy' interest of young people in their late teens or early twenties, perceived as new and somewhat revolutionary. Facebook was the first online social network which had a popular impact. Hence, it seemed to be a way for young people to connect, an aspect of 'youth culture'. (It was only later that older people came to join the site

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[3]https://techcrunch.com/2008/05/13/facemash-returns-as-what-else-a-facebook-app-uliken/

in significant numbers.) However, its early association with youth may have been because of its genesis, especially in the USA (i.e. it provided a means for college students to connect with each other). However, it soon became a network that most young adults and teenagers sought access to it, and slowly and surely it became a site on which interpersonal relationships could be managed.

Although at the start people seemed to engage with Facebook in diverse ways in terms of friendship, by about 2012 not being a member of Facebook was regarded as somewhat 'abnormal' by many young adults attending the University of Pretoria. In its early stage, it seemed to be generally viewed as only a friendship and relationship management tool, a convenient way to keep in touch with one's friends and acquaintances. Most people joined it without much consideration, because there was no cost involved in joining it, and the joining procedure was relatively easy.

 What it initially did was to provide people who were not specifically 'bloggers' with an accessible presence on the internet, and at the beginning it was regarded as a 'microblogging site'. A 'blog' is a regularly updated website or web page, typically managed by an individual or a small group, which is written in an informal or conversational style. A 'microblog' refers to shorter comments, usually made on a social network platform, rather than on a personal website. Microblogging is a combination of blogging and instant messaging that allows users to create short messages to be posted and shared with an audience online (Nations, 2017:[o][4]).

In the early years of Facebook, it was by no means the only social networking or microblogging site, but none of its early competitors, except for Twitter, were able to sustain the growth or develop the enormous numbers of users that Facebook and Twitter have today. It may be seen as puzzling that Facebook succeeded globally but its competitors failed, and that it rode waves of technological and cultural change while other websites disappeared. Facebook was not the only online site where individuals could interact. A culture of blogging had already started, and people were starting to explore the new web 2.0 technology[5] that allowed such connections.

In my experience, Facebook was very different initially to what it is today. Users had what were known as 'walls', compared to today's 'timelines', and on one's wall one could post messages or images, much like a blog, but friends could also post their messages or reply directly to comments posted on one's

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[4]https://www.lifewire.com/what-is-microblogging-3486200

[5]"The early period of the web is often referred to as Web 1.0 or the 'Web-as-information source' and is commonly placed in a dichotomy with Web 2.0 as the 'Web-as-participation- platform'. Hence, Web 1.0 is addressed as the informational web, an account of the web as a medium for publishing content and Web 2.0 as online interaction and user generated content" (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013: 1350).

wall, by oneself or by others. The fact that at the start an individual's Facebook page was known as a 'wall' reinforced the early perception of Facebook as a micro-blogging site. It also had a public feel to it. If one wanted post something publicly, one would put on it on one's 'wall'. Private communication on Facebook took place behind the 'wall', in the form of 'private' messages. In the beginning, it appeared that one's Facebook page was meant to be a public representation of one's self to the world. From its very beginning, Facebook presented the individual as being at the centre of their own universe. In Facebook's conception of the internet, one is at the centre and everything else that happens is contingent on the individual's experience. This may be what has defined modernity (Giddens 1991), although Facebook has reified this conception by positioning the user quite literally at the centre of their 'social' engagement on the site. It negates the notion of the internet as being a place of collectivity, and makes the focus of communication about what is relevant to the individual.

In this way every Facebook user's profile or 'wall' became their personal blog, but increasingly a blog where the value assigned to posts depended on the number of interactions that one could elicit from other individuals who were also members of Facebook. The manner in which the social platform enabled individuals to interact with each another's blogs was what made Facebook a more dynamic space in which to connect. However, the structural limitations of the 'profile' meant that one's Facebook profile could not be fully customised: individual profiles had a rigid colour scheme and a specific layout, with a designated space for a picture of the profile's owner, rather than allowing for freer self-expression, as some other blogging sites did. Looking back Facebook's layout of the profile at the start and today evokes the concept of an identity document of a drivers licence, which is interesting to note when considering the fact that Facebook requires users to use their real names, and does not allow pseudonymous accounts. Other blogging sites, for example, permitted customisable colour schemes and layout, with various template choices. Tumblr, which was launched in 2007, is an example of this form of microblogging site. It still exists, and arguably still thrives among various blogging communities. Third-party developers could develop applications and games that could be played communally, using Facebook as a means of connection (Pariser, 2011:24):

> Facebook was hardly the first social network: As Zuckerberg was hacking together his creation in the wee hours of the morning, a hairy, music-driven site named MySpace was soaring; before MySpace, Friendster had for a brief moment captured the attention of the *technorati*. But the Web site Zuckerberg had in mind was different. It wouldn't be a coy dating site, like Friendster. And unlike MySpace, which encouraged people to connect whether they knew each other or not, Facebook was about taking advantage of existing real-world social connections. Compared to its predecessors, Facebook was stripped down: the emphasis was on information, not flashy graphics or a cultural vibe. "We're a utility," Zuckerberg said later. Facebook was less like a nightclub than a phone company, a neutral platform for communication and collaboration.

Facebook was not then as widely known as Myspace was. However, since the decline of sites similar to Facebook, Facebook has provided an opportunity for people to voice 'public' opinions – this is a rather intuitive leap to make as more than a billion people are members of the site. While Facebook appears to be a neutral platform, this is only true in terms of self-expression or cultural expression. Facebook has generally become a platform for organisation of sprawling and random networks, based on people with whom one comes into contact: family members and relatives, friends, acquaintances and friends-of-friends. What is true about Facebook and related social networking applications, as well as other applications and platforms which make up what is now known as 'social media', is that they mean different things to different people. As described in Chapter 4, these platforms and applications constantly change and reinvent themselves.

Yet if Facebook has different meanings for different members of its diverse user base, how can it be the subject of study? While it may be perceived differently, depending on the individual and how they use it, it has become ubiquitous, with not being a member of it nowadays seen as odd among the students who were participants in this study. In fact, of all the respondents, only 0.4% or two people, were not on Facebook.

Facebook has become a platform on which everyone is present; hence not being a member can be translated into 'being left behind'. As an entity with its own agency, this research's broad goal is to investigate how this agency is manifested, while acknowledging that it 'meaning different things to different people' does indeed make the effect of its agency more difficult to see and resist. As I saw it it happened as follows: It has become a vehicle for people to connect with popular or alternative cultures, for example with fans of particular musicians, novels and films. Later, as Facebook evolved, such fan culture morphed into a more complex form, in which artists and writers, and even films and mini-series themselves became the subjects of curated pages, or became marketing tools 'competing' for various markets.

This shift happened gradually: a shift from connections to other people, to connections to 'brands'. This evolution occurred once consumer brands too had become entities with their own profiles[6]. A situation arose in which what was normalised was that people, in the form of 'friends', became something which one could buy as a brand, and the 'brand' could buy the same type of objects which one had become attached to. This creates what seemed to some of my respondents to be an awkward

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[6]Interestingly the move by Facebook to create dedicated 'business' pages seemed like a reactionary move to most people, and appeared to utilise Facebook in ways in which for it was not designed. However, the Facebook policy change had been triggered by businesses sometimes creating pages as if they were the pages of real people.

anomaly, in that impersonal 'brands' could post on their Facebook newsfeed as if they were 'friends'. One is then provided with various types of consumerism, competing for attention with 'friends'. This anomaly manifested initially with companies, which, if one liked their page or had a 'friend' who liked their page, could post on one's Facebook newsfeed. This incongruity made it easier for any brand to post on individuals' Facebook pages. The idea that everything is essentially just a brand began to take shape on Facebook. At this point Facebook was still the platform on which most people seemed simply to want to commune with their friends (Saedi, 2015:[o][7]):

> Facebook's utility is complicated on many levels. For some, it is the only tie or form of contact they have with individuals. It is the equivalent of those large hefty Yellow Pages that used to be delivered to my front step as a child. As Facebook messenger is so convenient, we often don't have actual email addresses of individuals. Leaving Facebook would be equated with leaving civilization and all forms of contact.

This quote is from a Psychology blog. However, the notion that being 'off Facebook' was to be 'equated with leaving civilisation and all forms of contact' had specific anthropological interest for me. Although this study has been undertaken in Africa and not in the United States, "we have witnessed the rise of the 'new' global media [Facebook], with great power to impose their systems on large portions of the world" (Ritzer, 2011: 141). As Tufekci (2014:17) argues:

> Social media is "optional"—especially for young people looking to become established socially and culturally—in the sense that not having a phone number is optional for working adults. To abandon social media is to isolate oneself outside of vital spaces for contemporary social life.

Facebook Creates New Meanings for Words

Facebook may have different meanings for different people, but its ubiquity has become undeniable. Its salience in our increasingly techno-mediated existence has led to the creation of new meanings for various words that I will highlight below. The terms in question are 'to like' or a 'like', 'to share' or a 'share', 'a friend' or 'to friend', 'privacy' and the 'social'.

The first two words have now become quantifiable nouns: a 'like' and a 'share'. These concepts are represented on Facebook by social buttons, meaning that on the Facebook platform there is a button promoting these Facebook actions, and since 2010 this has also been the case for a large number of other websites. A 'like' or 'to like' represent communicative actions, where one is able to express the fact that one likes a particular piece of mediated content, or more importantly a consumer brand or a commercial page.

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[7]https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/millennial-media/201506/is-leaving-facebook-becoming-trendy

In a more possession-oriented culture the 'share' button could be called the 'steal button, or the 'copy button'. In older computer terminology it would be likened to the action of copying and pasting content from one place to another, usually on one's own Facebook 'timeline'. I deal with the concept of sharing in greater detail later in Chapter 4, because the 'share' button and the idea of 'sharing' one's life on social media are often confused, and may lead to ignoring the memetic mass media which make their rounds on Facebook and are seldom critically examined, since the concept of 'sharing' on Facebook is often seen by respondents only in terms of sharing information about one's life and not the sharing of viral media on social media. I argue in Chapter 4 that the concept of 'sharing' in social media is quite different to the traditional concept of sharing. Sharing something on Facebook can involve two parties or more. Whatever is shared does not necessarily belong to the sharer before it is shared. In fact, I argue that sharing represents a "baseline communism", in that people share news, images, music and video clips. This means that to some extent mediated cultural artefacts become communally consumed, while interpersonal connections become commodified through privacy fetishism (Fuchs, 2011).

The 'like', much like the 'share', is of the utmost importance, because it forms part of what is known as the 'like-economy (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). This happens because the more 'likes' something gets on Facebook, the more visible it becomes to the public at large, the more likely it is to be seen and thus accrue increasing numbers of likes. Attention then becomes a commodity, as Facebook has become an essential place for marketing any company or product – a situation which 90% of respondents agreed to be the case. Facebook, because it seeks to be seen as an opportunity for self-expression, as well as where people give expression to their friendships, means that people become commodified much like consumer brands, and consumer brands seek to be seen as friends. This is how Facebook becomes a vehicle for consumerism and a consumerist hegemony. In this vein I examine the political economy of this 'like economy' in Chapter 4, and examine the idea that Facebook sells this visibility to companies, but also sells the data one leaves behind or produces (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013).

This means that Facebook takes all the information regarding one's use of the site, as well as obtaining responses from one to particular questions, for which it often requests one's response, and uses this pool of information allegedly to 'improve one's experience' on the site, depending upon such factors as whether or not one is very active on the site (i.e. how often one visits it), and whether or not one has 'friends' on the site, through the sharing of mass mimetic media, which serves as enticing and random entertainment. The patterns of what the user has 'liked', as well as who the user's friends are, and what has been clicked on, all provide further information about the user for Facebook. This information can

create an accurate demographic. Facebook creates a panoptic gaze based in a semi-public space, where all one's friends and acquaintances may be watching. Facebook is certainly watching, because information about one's 'social' life is its product. Gerlitz and Helmond (2013: 349) suggest:

> In this Like economy, the social is of particular economic value, as user interactions are instantly transformed into comparable forms of data and presented to other users in a way that generates more traffic and engagement … the Like button can be used to read a cookie from a user's device, which is issued after creating a Facebook account or visiting any website with Facebook features. From that moment on, the button is tracing the visitor's browsing behaviour and is automatically generating data for Facebook by connecting it to individual Facebook profiles. Being tracked by Facebook through such cookies can only be prevented by disabling the use of cookies in the browser options or by installing a browser add-on such as Ghostery that disallows third party tracking. Most crucially, this does not only apply to Facebook users, the Like button cookie can also trace non-users and add the information as anonymous data to the Facebook database. Following Facebook, this data is used to improve its services but also for personalised advertising.

Not only does Facebook utilise the patterns of one's activity on the site, but it also takes into account information about other sites on the internet one has visited, and so keep tabs and use such information to better target advertising, with the idea that not being on the site becomes 'abnormal', and opting out of this global advertising market becomes much more difficult than merely opposing it.

This was made evident when one of my informants left Facebook for over a year. He returned simply because navigating the internet became much more difficult without his having a presence on Facebook, as he then had to remember different passwords for a multitude of sites: it was much easier to just "log-in with Facebook". This access to and the tally of 'what people like' creates an economy where to 'like', or 'a like' can be seen as a unit of currency in the sense that the more popular something (anything) gets, the more additional likes it then generates and the more visible it becomes. However, such a form of 'like-currency' is generally structurally alienated from any sort of formal exchange value which such a 'currency' might have. Furthermore, in this like-economy, 'likes' are an indiscriminate base unit, which means there is no differentiation between 'liking' a friends photo, or 'liking' a multi-national corporation's advert, or 'liking' a non-profit organisation. I argue that in Chapter 4 that since the naturalisation and ubiquity of Facebook has reached the point where it can be said to constitute Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus', the space of Facebook becomes a hegemonic structure in service of consumer capitalism, because people are encouraged to have a personal relationship to brands, as if they were people, and people are encouraged to make brands of themselves on Facebook, the idea being that such mediated self-branding is necessary to compete in the social and professional marketplace.

This idea of a 'personal brand' can be stated differently: it is a mediated and thus fetishized narrative, through which people make sense of their lives and the lives of others. People are encouraged to understand the narratives of those around them within the frame of the digitally mediated narratives which Facebook affords them. I use the term 'brand' because it speaks directly to the notion that on Facebook one is the product, and by extension the narratives that constitute one's life become commoditised too by their mediation. Already within the word 'brand' is the implication of the fetishism of narrative. According to Barthes (2004: 237):

> The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting ... stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation. ... [N]arrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. [N]arrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.

Despite the growing idea of having to maintain a 'brand' through one's online presence, Facebook is actually, nowadays, less and less a 'public' space. In fact Facebook encourages people to fetishize their online privacy and *not* to post and interact publicly. Such privacy fetishism complements Facebook's monopoly on its like-economy and can even be seen as a means for it to enrich its social mapping[8] with increasingly nuanced information about its users. I examine 'privacy fetishism' in more detail in Chapter 5. Privacy fetishism means that the 'bigger picture' of all one's Facebook interactions is only visible to Facebook itself.

The next chapter, Chapter 6, looks at online protest and activism, and how, if Facebook is to provide a forum for activism, it needs to be a public space. Now the very notion of public openness (rather than privacy) seems to be at odds with the notion that one's Facebook brand is a necessary advertisement to assist navigating today's social and professional spheres. In practice, users of Facebook can choose between a range of privacy settings. It is difficult to determine the most commonly chosen privacy setting. Facebook users do not always fully comprehend how public their posts are.

Posting to a group is one way to ensure that a post is more public than a post which is only accessible to one's friends. However, Facebook users have to join a group to have access to its posts. Most groups

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[8] The social graph refers to a map of everybody on Facebook, and millions of other websites that are linked to Facebook, how they are related, and extends to a history of what they 'like', what they click on, who they are 'friends' with and how they interact with those 'friends'. It is hence a map of data of all of the actions of all individuals on Facebook and it is the property of Facebook Inc. This product has made Facebook's founder, Mark Zuckerberg, the fifth richest person on earth, worth an estimated US$ 71,5 billion.

are 'closed', which means that the user has to apply to join the group, or ask the group moderator to add them to the group. Only 2% of respondents in my study said they preferred belonging to groups to obtain news, rather than getting 'general news' from their newsfeed. Groups are created for a myriad reasons, and moderators usually frown upon blatant self-promotion or content that does not fit with the theme of the group. Posting to a group then becomes only partly public, much like posting a message to one's 'friends', or sharing a message posted by a 'friend'. I did not specifically study the use of Facebook groups in this dissertation.

Even if all of one's information settings are completely public, posts require the collaboration of 'friends' to give any post broader circulation outside of one's own circle of 'friends'.

Klang (2016: 5) points out:

> The medium has an excellent system of metrics that allows us to measure success in the number of friends, likes, and shares. Therefore, a successful message is the one that is shared widely across the network. Ideally, individuals who have critically read and support the message are the ones who will share it. The activist wishing to undertake a campaign on social media must therefore play by the rules of that media if the campaign is to be successful.

This concept of a 'friend' of whom one is unaware is a trend I identified in my research, and is known as 'fictitious kinship' (Carsten, 2000) or a loose tie. It could be a person whom one met once previously on a night out and never thought of again, or even a one-time friend-of-a-friend who became one's Facebook friend a few years ago and whom one has never thought of since. Focus group discussions revealed that generally respondents could not name every one of their Facebook 'friends'. Some research participants saw Facebook as not being connected to one's friends, but rather being connected to one's public circle of acquaintanceship. Hence the more public a person is, the more 'friends' they are likely to have, and so the bigger the size of their 'Facebook public'. Ironically the more public a person is in the sense that Habermas (1991) might use the term (i.e. referring to a public figure or a celebrity), the less likely they are to have many Facebook friends. Facebook is seen as a more private social network, and hence celebrities and public figures would have fan pages, through which the general public would be able to connect to their public personas.

The distinction lies in the way in which the term 'friend' is used on Facebook, implying sometimes only a loose degree of kinship between people who are for all intents and purposes complete strangers.

Introducing the Quantified Socio-cultural Capital

One of the main themes of this dissertation is the new form of attention economy, and the ways in which the ambiguity of public and private spaces on Facebook lead to discussions about Facebook as a vehicle of consumerist hegemony. Facebook is a space where consumer brands come to be represented and people are encouraged to see themselves as brands. Public discourse is thus subjected to the pressure of competitive markets, while mass-mediated information and entertainment is freely shared and not 'paid' for in anything other than a 'view' or a 'like'. The agenda for such mass media is often just to entertain, but sometimes to influence people, or to draw them to another website where there is even more advertising, which subsidises the external site. The result is a competitive environment of mostly user-shared rather than user-generated content. Competitiveness is an aspect of the thriving like-economy, but activism and social awareness campaigns have to compete for attention in this harsh environment. The result is that arguably Facebook becomes a place where activism and social campaigning happen to a diminishing extent.

The like-economy on Facebook dictates that the more 'likes' or 'views' something has the more valuable it is. In terms of my construction of Facebook as 'habitus', it can be said that Facebook acts in an attempt to quantify the 'social' in its own image by establishing itself in the first place as 'habitus'. The investigation of Facebook creates 'habitus' to reify, quantify and ultimately turn the mediated cultural artefact into the baseline communal property, while commodifying the interaction with the connections made around it, and quantifying it in realms of uncertainty about youth culture. Subcultures seemingly disappear into a postmodern malaise of patchwork influences and expressions, and are consumed, but not wholeheartedly lived. This is not to suggest that 'traditional' subcultures do not exist, but they seem to have reached a state of atrophy, or are so 'underground' that they are no longer visible, because of the free instant sharing of cultural expression as a form of 'capital' in itself. There is a tendency in the Facebook environment regarding popular or youth culture towards 'trending' rather than creating an exclusive club or tribe.

This apparent postmodern malaise and the flattening of subcultural identity is impossible to prove using my data or my experience of Facebook. However, it seems to be complementary to the 'habitus' of the like-economy and the algorithmically determined public space of Facebook. Such effects are not necessarily as widespread when one moves away from Facebook. Perhaps it is the way this current type of always on, constantly streaming and automated visibility changes the way in which cultural expression looks, perhaps constant repetition makes it seem 'flatter' and resistance is impossible if this is a symptom of the medium. A situation arises where people are encouraged to be their segmented patchworks of conformity, and where difference, creativity or novelty is rendered invisible through

application of an algorithm [see footnote 3] (which gives you what you 'want') through a website which connects one to the world.

Conclusion

> [What] people mostly want from public space is to be alone with their personal networks. It is good to come together physically, but it is more important to stay tethered to our devices … when technology engineers intimacy, relationships can be reduced to mere connections. And then, easy connection becomes redefined as intimacy … It might [once] have seemed intrusive, if not illegal, that my mobile phone would tell me the location of all my acquaintances within a ten-mile radius. But these days we are accustomed to all this. Life in a media bubble has come to seem natural. So has the end of a certain public etiquette: on the street, we speak into the invisible microphones on our mobile phones and appear to be talking to ourselves. We share intimacies with the air as though unconcerned about who can hear us or the details of our physical surroundings … are we comfortable with virtual environments that propose themselves not as places for recreation but as new worlds to live in? What do we have, now that we have what we say we want— now that we have what technology makes easy? (Turkle, 2011: 14-17).

This chapter is an introduction to the ideas which arose from my critical ethnographic engagement with the Facebook site. Initially I assumed that it provided a context for public discourse. The old and public forms of online activism dealt with in the next chapter seemed to attest to this. However, the Facebook platform changes rapidly, and now seems to be a medium geared to advertising and consumerism. Hence one's public message, whatever it may be, must have the attention and entertainment value of a good advertisement, but even so its degree of visibility is not really within one's control. Causes and activism play out in the same public space that global consumer brands do. The idea that individuals can raise awareness about an issue seems at odds with the Facebook platform's business model.

If Facebook is the channel through which our global information flows, then we have to examine its structures, rules and barriers. For example, Klang (2016: 5) states:

> Using Facebook as a site for sharing protest messages has a barrier since the site could decide to remove the content for violating its community standards. For example, Facebook's real name policy caused an Ethiopian LGBT activist to be banned for using the pseudonym

HappyAddis. The activist used a pseudonym as homosexuality is illegal in Ethiopia, a
country which enforces strict penalties for this crime.

The irony of the structures of Facebook actively curtailing the efforts of an LGBTQ activist lies in the
fact that, as we shall see in Chapter 2, Facebook in 2015 in a sense encouraged all its users to be a form
LGBTQ activists by encouraging them to use the *Celebrate Pride* filter over their profile picture.

Another example of how Facebook structures curtail activism is an email I received from a group
trying to prevent a certain corporation from using a particularly toxic pesticide. The group was
encouraging people to donate funds so that they could pay Facebook for advertising to counter the
publicity of the large corporation, which was using a toxic pesticide and 'flooding' Facebook with 'pro-
insecticide' advertising. This is an example of the challenges of activism on Facebook in 2017.
However, in the following chapter I will examine examples of global online movements which have
developed successfully on Facebook.

Outline of successive chapters

Chapter 2, *Ironic Spectator Activism,* looks at how pure internet-based activism manifested on Facebook in
the past. It also considers what the implications have been of using Facebook as a medium for solely
online activism and protest. This chapter focuses specifically on online protests that seek only to raise
awareness about issues and in some cases lead to donations, rather than on the type of protest in which
people would 'take to the streets' in physical protest marches. The protests examined here occurred
only on Facebook, and protesters or activists protested using only a computer or smart phone.

Chapter 3, *Protest Moves Offline,* examines how the use of Facebook actually affected 'on-the-street'
protests, as well as consumption of protest as a media spectacle. This chapter focuses specifically on
the #Feesmustfall protests of 2015-2016.

Chapter 4, *Ubiquity and the Myth of Free-flowing (Social) Information,* pays attention to specifically how and
why Facebook has achieved such ubiquitous acceptance by users. The ubiquity is explained in terms of
Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus'. Based on the notion of Facebook as 'habitus', I propose that
Facebook can be seen as a system of control akin to Foucault's invocation of Bentham's 'Panopticon',
which was used to help comprehend modern structural systems of surveillance and control.

Chapter 5, *A Liked Privacy, A Shared Social in a Post-internet World,* addresses how Facebook commodifies the spheres of the internet, the social and privacy. In this chapter I use Gramsci's concept of hegemony to describe how the commodification of these three spheres serves the neoliberal ideology that all spheres are 'fair game' for profiteering.

Chapter 6 provides a Conclusion, in which I briefly summarise and link all the themes addressed previously in the dissertation.

Chapter 2: Networks of Ironic Spectator Activism

> As virtual links between people become more ubiquitous, collective power becomes more voluntaristic, affinity-based, and ephemeral. Temporary on-line movements spring up constantly, attracting people from diverse walks of life who happen to feel allegiance to some goal. The movements are easily joined and make no onerous demands: from the comfort of one's living room one can donate money to local rescues for feral cats and in the next minute sign an on-line petition against human rights violations in Syria.(Noonan 2016:[o][9])

Introduction: What is a Hash-tag and what is Slacktivism?

Online protest and activism is called 'slacktivism' when the protest or activism does not escape the confines of the online space, and so may not be visible anywhere outside of the online space. What has become clear since social media like Facebook colonised internet engagement is that protests that originate in online space become understood and perpetuated by social media.

The nature of purely online protest is that it does not need very much involvement on the part of the participant. From the beginning of social networking sites, as well as email petitions, using them as sites for activism has been seen as a rather lazy way to engage in activism, especially if posting on the internet is the only way in which the activism manifests itself. Today social activism manifests to a large extent on Facebook. When the activism only takes place on the internet the effectiveness of it is often questioned, and people may ask whether a person is supporting a cause because of a heartfelt desire to help the cause, or supporting the cause in order to impress their peers and maintain their personal brand. Once a cause is 'liked' or the video or image of a cause is 'shared', whether or not the individual's involvement will go any further is debatable, because as far as one's online brand is concerned the cause is already part of the brand. However, despite the notion that activism online may be a dimension of the personal brand (and arguably this adds credence to the cause supported), this type of sharing is still seen as 'slacktivism'.

Protests and causes are often given their identity or brand through the use of the hash-tag. The hash-tag provides a vehicle for messages of protest to gain momentum, since it creates an identity for a cause to rally under. The hash-tag is a simple way for a person to give a post on social media a theme or subject. Originating on the social network Twitter, the hash-tag is today commonly used on Facebook. It can be used as an identifying tag, for example, if you type in #FeesMustFall into the Facebook 'search' bar, Facebook will respond with all the posts from your 'friends', as well as public posts that have been tagged with "#FeesMustFall" or the "fees must fall hash tag". Once a word (or in the case

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[9]https://philosophersforchange.org/2016/03/08/capitalism-socialism-and-everyday-life-in-the-twenty-first-century/

of #FeesMustFall, a few words are written together as one word) is prefaced by the hash(#) sign, the word becomes 'clickable[10]', meaning that if one clicks on that word one will be taken to a chronological list of every public, or visible to you, post that that has been tagged with that hash-tag. I deal with the #FeesMustFall protests – of which my respondents and I had first hand experience – in the next chapter, Chapter 3, where protests manifest in physical space. However, the current chapter discusses protests that manifest only online.

Interestingly hash-tags can also be used as a way of making an aside comment which clarifies or enriches the content of the initial post or comment, or provides extra information regarding what one feels about what is posted. For example, if in a post or comment one apologises, but the apology is intended to be read as insincere or sarcastic, then the hash-tag #sorrynotsorry could be used. Alternatively, the aforementioned hash-tag could be read as an insincere or sarcastic 'apology' for not being 'sorry'. I use this example to illustrate how nuanced the use of hash tags can be. A mentionable type of hash-tag that relates specifically to the 'like-economy', introduced in the previous chapter, is a hashtag appealing for 'likes', for instance '#tagforlikes'. This hash-tag is used by those who want to share their attention as a commodity in order to promote another person's post, on the assumption that the favour will be returned. The hash-tag itself has its own origin story.

The use of the hash-tag stems from the earliest days of the internet (Stinson, 2015: [o][11]):

> … as early as 1988, in networks where users communicated through channels, the subject of which was indicated by the hash sign (#Tokyo was a channel of people talking about Tokyo). By the new millennium, however, hashtags were not widely used online except by the techno-elite. In 2007, an employee at Twitter suggested prefixing the names of groups or 'channels' with a #. This suggestion was initially rejected as alienating and over-techie, but was eventually adopted, and the meteoric rise of the hashtag was set in motion.

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Along with the seemingly revolutionary power of new global media and web 2.0 (as referred to in Chapter 1), and borne out by the emergence of the 'hash-tag' came the opportunity for anyone anywhere to promote their own cause on social media. Some causes did not find traction, but the ones that did started a new form of online activism where one could simply share a cause on social media

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[10]It becomes a link that one can click on.
[11]https://www.wired.com/2015/10/the-secret-history-of-the-hashtag-slash-and-interrobang/

and feel that something had been done for that cause. This practice was perceived by many as lazy and ultimately unhelpful to the cause concerned, and was dubbed 'slacktivism'.

Slacktivism is a portmanteau of the words 'slacker' and 'activism'. The Oxford English Dictionary (2016: [o][12]) definition is as follows: "Actions performed via the Internet in support of a political or social cause but regarded as requiring little time or involvement, e.g. signing an online petition or joining a campaign group on a social media website or application."

The www.urbandictionary.com (2016:[o]13) definition is more pointed:

> The act of participating in obviously pointless activities as an expedient alternative to actually expending effort to fix a problem. Signing an email petition to stop rampant crime is slacktivism. Want to really make your community safer? Get off your ass and start a neighbourhood watch!

The term appears to have been coined in 1995 at the Cornerstone Festival by Dwight Ozard and Fred Clark (Christensen, 2011). The term was an abbreviation of the compound noun slacker-activism, which refers to bottom-up activities by young people to affect society on a small, personal scale (such as planting a tree, as opposed to participating in a protest). The term originally had a positive connotation. The negative connotation of the word evolved with the evolution of internet communication e.g. email petitions, or someone giving a 'like'[14] to a certain cause or sharing a post about a cause, but that is as far as their involvement will go. Slacktivism connotes any form of activism or support for a cause that consists only of action in a virtual space (sharing or liking in the case of Facebook) with no consequences in the real world. People are ambivalent about sharing a cause on social media, although they see it as a small gesture that may raise awareness and that involves little effort.

Users see the social media site as something bigger than themselves, a force that because of its sheer scale becomes transcendent and ubiquitous. "You never know who might see it", I was told by a respondent. The idea of being able to send a small message out into a sea of communications that could ignite a cause or be read by someone who could take the cause further is the motivation for sharing causes around which people can collectively organise. Most people whom I interviewed saw the practice of individually championing a cause on Facebook as rather pointless, but many participated in such shows of solidarity. There was a general feeling that sharing posts to gain greater exposure was a

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[12]https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/slacktivism
[13]https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=slacktivism
[14]A 'like' on Facebook is an action where one responds to a post or share by clicking the 'like' button. Others who encounter the post may (depending on the liker's privacy settings) be able to see that that person 'liked' the particular post and the total number of people who have 'liked' the post.

way of creating awareness of issues. However, it does seem to turn protest into an object which can be easily and conspicuously consumed, with very little effort. Online protests and activism can become a badge of one's own identity through appeal to collectivity, as well as expressing a sincere desire to champion a cause. However, the danger with social media and Facebook in general is that everything one posts can be seen as a component of one's personal brand15. The internet and social media has been accused of turning people into 'slacktivists', because liking and sharing are done in lieu of actually donating effort or money to a cause.

There seems to be a marked decline in expressions of humanitarianism on Facebook and online, because of an increase in personalisation appeals to collectivity can now at times be seen as detrimental to the idea of individual personal promotion within the metrics of the visibility economy of the site. This is dealt with in greater detail in chapter 5, but suffice it to say that Facebook has become a space which caters to a more insular connection to the world, where expressions, and messages are not perceived as public. It is a space where one makes announcements like a press release – to the people one knows, and where many people get 'news' about their friends and their world. This change seemed to me to have occurred gradually as people learned to negotiate the space, along with increasing ubiquity of the site, which seemed to go hand-in-hand with an increasing commercialisation of the space. This was not always the case, as is evidenced in historic instances of 'slacktivism', which manifested on Facebook.

One of the assertions of this thesis is that Facebook, together with mediated content production and consumption, changes at an ever accelerating pace. Currently the political/activist discourse on Facebook has been dominated by news media and 'professional' mediated productions from a wide spectrum of sources. Activism has migrated from Facebook. A possible reason for this is the increasingly divisive nature of Facebook engagement, both structurally and owing to the worsening crisis of global capitalism, which leads more people to become ironic spectators of distant others. With increasing use of the site for advertising, as well as social media becoming a forum where people advertise their personal 'brand'.

Compounding this is Facebook's push for 'relevance', meaning that the site feeds one content about issues that one seems to be interested in (based on one's previous interactions with the Facebook site and with other parts of the internet). However, I argue that Facebook actually promotes visibility of

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15The concept of the 'personal brand' is carried through this entire thesis, as all social media users mediate themselves through online profiles, which communicate their personal brand. Whatever one does on social media is visible and becomes part of branding of oneself, however unwitting.

content that generates profits of Facebook. Online activism is hence irrelevant. Another reason for the decline in online activism may be the proliferation of smart cell phone devices amongst those who were previously on the connectionless side of the digital divide.

Political correctness seems to argue now that speaking on behalf of others, which is what most forms of online slacktivism involve, is 'bigotry', since the great emancipatory force of social media has given everybody a voice of their own. It is ironic that there are more people with mobile phones than with proper sanitation: As a 2013 article sates according to the UN, "Out of the world's estimated 7 billion people, 6 billion have access to mobile phones. Only 4.5 billion have access to working toilets."(Wang 2013;[o]16). Some examples of 'slacktivism' investigated during my fieldwork are analysed below.

Fetishization of Distant Suffering: #Kony2012

Researcher Lilie Chouliaraki (2013) sees online activism in the form of a responding to a call to assist people in dire situations such as poverty or war as the "fetishization of distant suffering", when it involves 'liking', sharing, donating funds or signing an online petition. The person who views such a post becomes an 'ironic spectator', whose 'post-modern' postures of cool cynicism are directly challenged by the question whether the call to action does anything or does enough. As she argues (Chouliaraki, 2013:2):

> Irony refers to a disposition of detached knowingness, a self-conscious suspicion vis à vis all claims to truth, which comes from acknowledging that there is always a disjunction between what is said and what exists – that there are no longer 'grand narratives' to hold the two together (Rorty, 1989). Whilst irony is often translated into 'post-modern' postures of cool cynicism that reject moral attachment in favour of playful agnosticism, the spectacle of vulnerable others, I argue, complicates this posture in that, by virtue of confronting us with their suffering, it continues to raise the question of 'what to do' – it continues to call upon us as moral actors. The ironic spectator is, in this sense, an impure or ambivalent gaze that stands, at once, sceptical towards any moral appeal to solidarity action and, yet, open to doing something about those who suffer.

This stance of ironic spectator is made possible by the de-contextualisation of the internet and by extension, social media and Facebook. However, on Facebook the action of sharing, liking or signing an online petition becomes a socially visible performance, and this visibility reifies *fetishization* of the distant suffering.

Yet Mark Zuckerberg has been quoted as saying, "A squirrel dying in your front yard may be more relevant to your interests right now than people dying in Africa" (Zuckerberg, quoted in Kapanipathi *et al.*, 2014: 1). His comment speaks to the personalisation which Facebook enables, so that a person's 'social' experience on the site is tailor-made for them and related only to their own interests, making the world more insular. Furthermore, the proliferation of smart cell phones in the global South means that today distant sufferers are expected to speak for themselves or be attended to by those for whom their suffering may be 'relevant'. According to the UN, "Out of the world's estimated 7 billion people, 6 billion have access to mobile phones. Only 4.5 billion have access to working toilets" (Wang, 2013:[o])17. The ubiquity of connectivity has seemingly increased the fetishization of distant suffering.

One of the last and perhaps best known and most successful campaigns which fetishized distant suffering and did involve "people dying in Africa" was the 'movement' called "#Kony2012".

The Kony 2012 campaign was a short film and a parody of an election campaign – to elect the warlord Joseph Kony – initiated by the NGO Invisible Children Inc. in 2012. The campaign was designed to raise awareness about the use of child soldiers in the Ugandan civil war by the Lord's Resistance Army led by warlord Joseph Kony. What is interesting about the irony of the campaign is that it echoes memes that use parody and appropriation of a common tool for comedy. Ironically the fake presidential campaign for Joseph Kony for one respondent echoed the imagery of the Obama presidential campaign and he years later, remembered it for this as he put it, "subtle racism". The goal of the campaign was to increase awareness and to raise funds for Invisible Children*,* as well as to create enough public outrage to compel governments to step in and bring Joseph Kony to justice. The campaign had great success after the film was shared by celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey and singer Rihanna. The film received over 100 million views and the campaign raised US$ 28 million (Taylor, 2014:[o])18. Criticism followed, as some saw the film a reflecting a 'white saviour industrial complex'. On his blog, 'Africa is a country', Elliot Ross makes a scathing indictment19:

> It's meant to be an "awareness-raising" film. What it is is a study of a bunch of vain and ignorant young people who can think and feel only in clichés and appear to be labouring under the notion that Mark Zuckerberg invented both compassion and democracy for them sometime around 2004 … You say Zooey Deschanel has tweeted that she wants to stop Joseph Kony? You say Kony has reduced Vanessa Hudgens to tears? But of course, we must send in the drones … The problem with the "awareness" argument is that it suggests that interest in the war in Uganda can be separated out from the experience of intensely racialized and charisma-driven moral masturbation, an experience which turns out to be, more than anything, one of the most intensely satisfying kinds of identity-formation … To

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17http://newsfeed.time.com/2013/03/25/more-people-have-cell-phones-than-toilets-u-n-study-shows/
18https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/12/16/was-kony2012-a-failure/
19http://africasacountry.com/2012/03/phony-2012-risible-children/

ask people to climb down from the soaring heights of "Kony 2012" (remember how we fall down into Uganda from the heavenly realms of Jason Russell's Facebook page?), a place where they get to feel both sanctified and superior, and truly descend into the mire of history and confusion is simply too big an ask. It would be boring and difficult and it would not be about Facebook or Angelina Jolie or coloured wristbands or me. When the euphoria evaporates and the Twittersphere has dried its tears (probably by the end of this week), all that remains will be yet another powerful myth of African degradation beneath Western power–and Jason Russell will be famous and rich.

The transience of Facebook posts reflects this. What is topical in the morning might be 'old news' by the afternoon. As one of my research respondents noticed when his girlfriend responded to a post on her timeline two weeks after he had posted it, "It seems like she is never on Facebook, I had almost forgotten posting it". In terms of activism one might assume that the messages would be heartfelt and enduring, but the nature of the medium means that this is not really the case. The need for instant response or gratification mean that causes are not always followed through with, or followed up on, when they manifest on social media, and #Kony 2012 was no exception.

#Kony 2012 is a damning indictment of distant social media activism. It was successful in raising awareness and fetishizing the idea of making a ('grassroots') difference through sharing on social media, but made very little actual difference to people's lives in Uganda. What #Kony 2012 did do was to expose the questionable practises of the NGO that produced a video, which has been called an example of "soft bigotry" and an example of the "white saviour industrial complex" by Nigerian-American novelist Teju Cole[20]. The NGO was accused by Ayesha Nibbe of Hawaii Pacific University of being militarily involved by acting as an intelligence agency for tracking the Lord's Resistance Army's movements and distributing pamphlets to lure defectors.[21] This type of humanitarianism was seen as serving to expand the United States military's involvement in Africa.

Kony is still free and his Lord's Resistance Army still exists at the time of writing. Despite all the online traction and all the funds raised, the call to "Stop Kony" had to itself end. This is a prime example of 'slacktivism', because on the surface it appeared to be successful, as it had enormous viral success and celebrity endorsement, but it failed to achieve its ultimate goal. Millions of people who saw the video did not really seem to care, in fact many of my interviewees took quite a while to even recall the campaign. It seems that social media leads to a rather short attention span, with people always looking to consume the latest gossip, protest or meme. However, if the protest does not affect a person directly he/she is likely to lose interest without really minding if the goals of the protest are achieved.

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[20]https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-soft-bigotry-of-kony-2012/254194/
[21]https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/12/16/was-kony2012-a-failure/?utm_term=.665b0245d1aa

The investment of liking or sharing is a new form of capital, but the cause has to compete with the latest consumer goods, which explains the emotive nature and stylisation of the initial #Kony2012 appeal. The risk with the hive mentality22 of social media is that once a cause such as #Kony2012 has been branded as "the white saviour industrial complex" then the cause is also dismissed on these grounds. #Kony2012 is an example where the promoters of the cause itself can be seen as flawed in their approach, and perhaps distance from the issue for most social media users meant that follow up was difficult. For this reason, the idea that all voices can be represented or visible no longer makes sense, and perhaps the fetishization of distant suffering online is increasingly less common.

Another possible reason that the movement did not endure online was that #Kony 2012 was not able to achieve a state of multi-nodal existence. The movement was one dimensional, with all donations were funnelled through Invisible Children. It did not inspire a more diverse response – with perhaps a number of organisations working together in Uganda23. When Invisible Children, mired by scandal and accusations of mismanagement, failed, the #Kony2012 movement hence also collapsed. If there had been other actors involved in the movement, it might have survived, and become 'mimetic' and thus 'hydra headed'. #Kony2012 may perhaps have been the death cry for the fetishization of distant suffering, which is a symptom of the 'Western saviour industrial complex'.

Today social media can be seen then as perversely giving distant sufferers a mediated voice. 'Speaking for the people' in the sense of fetishizing distant suffering may have fallen away, but even if everyone can speak for themselves there is no guarantee that they will be heard. Perhaps social media dynamics today have led to a competition to be heard, where people seem to echo sentiments that speak for them and don't listen to the other. Since Facebook is more insular people tend to fetishize their own personal experience and move away from a mediated multiplicity. This is done, as I argue in later chapters, by algorithmically 'personalising' ones experience in order to create an idea of the Facebook user which can be used to personalise (suggest) the targeting of advertising. The exact mechanics behind such algorithmic targeting are a fiercely guarded 'trade secret' for Facebook. However, my argument is that the increasing ideology of personalisation on Facebook to tell *one's own* story means giving suffering people the right to tell their own story.

22The 'hive mentality' can be compared to Durkheim's (2014) notion of 'collective consciousness' being radically different from 'individual consciousness', so while one might think that stopping Kony would be a worthy or important cause, the 'collective consciousness' [hive mentality] dictating that such action would be a 'white saviour industrial complex', that the cause might become an object of ridicule and not something to seriously rally around.
23This can be seen as an example of what sociologist and social media theorist Zeynep Tufekci means when in a TED talk (2014) she says that what technology allows us to do does not always converge with what we want it to do. Social movements want to act informally, because they do not want institutional leadership, they want to stay out of politics, and they fear corruption and co-option. The case of #Kony 2012 is a prime example of activism fuelled by social media that cannot cross this threshold and thus is ultimately left toothless.

The #IceBucketChallenge

After the failure of #Kony2012, other examples of online activism that I will discuss here involve some kind of performance rather than just the action of 'sharing'. The next case, the #IceBucketChallenge, involved activists or participants having a bucket of iced water poured on their heads. This was an example of widespread social media activism, and was part of a campaign to raise funds and awareness for a rare and devastating disease, ALS or Lou Gehrig's Disease, which causes a slow paralysis throughout the body. I have personal experience of the disease as my uncle died of it in 2011. A few celebrities who have suffered from it include former South African rugby player Joost van der Westhuisen and scientist Steven Hawking. In the #IceBucketChallenge a person would be challenged by a friend to either donate to the ALS Foundation or to have a bucket of iced water poured over their head while being filmed. The film footage would be uploaded and the individual would then in turn nominate a friend or a group of friends to take the #IceBucketChallenge. The image of having a bucket of iced water poured over one's head was the spectacle in this campaign, which meant that there was no fetishization of distant suffering.

The #IceBucketChallenge received a massive spike in popularity and the individual #IceBucketChallenge posts themselves had 28 million uploads, comments and likes on Facebook (Facebook Newsroom).[24] Once again celebrities were quick to respond, with Justin Timberlake, Justin Bieber, David Beckham, Donatella Versace, Jennifer Lopez, Taylor Swift, Oprah Winfrey and others taking the challenge (Townsend in *BBC News Magazine,* 2014).[25]

The campaign was initiated when a golfer called Chris Kennedy was nominated by a friend to do an #IceBucketChallenge, and to choose a charity to support. Chris Kennedy then chose ALS. In his video he nominated his cousin, Jeanette Senerchia, to take the Challenge. Jeanette's video achieved wide circulation and reached Pat Quinn, who had ALS. The meme then spread through his online community, and eventually to Peter Frates, a professional baseball player who suffered from ALS and had a large fan base[26]. Once the meme spread to his fan base it attracted the attention of major celebrities and ultimately was able to raise over US$ 100 million for ALS research. This account shows how an idea or post can spread very quickly to a large number of people and how a cause can become viral, even without a slick media campaign such as Kony2012 had had. The #IceBucketChallenge was

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[24]https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2014/08/the-ice-bucket-challenge-on-facebook/
[25]http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-29013707

[26]http://time.com/3136507/als-ice-bucket-challenge-started/

concerned with the suffering of others even if not all that 'distant' – to the majority of participants in the challenge – and despite the performance value, it did seem to be an organic call to collective action. Since the #IceBucketChallenge in 2014, it seems that social media has become something of an echo chamber. Global movements are now much less likely to develop on Facebook.

A viral meme which is similar to the #IceBucketChallenge is the #Neknomination. Originating in Britain and derived from the words 'neck' and 'nominate', this online fad involves a person filming themselves drinking a pint of some form of alcohol (usually beer but sometimes vodka or tequila) in one gulp and posting the video online. They then nominate a friend or group of friends to do the same, and these friends in turn have to film themselves drinking a pint in one gulp and nominate others to also take the challenge. Similarities between this meme and the #IceBucketChallenge are evident in the way that both involve performing an action which is uncomfortable, filming it, and then nominating someone else to do the same within a certain time limit. However, the #Neknomination does not involve activism as it brings no social benefits to anyone. Both memes27 were taken up by Facebook users in South Africa, but not to the same extent as in Britain or the United States.

One aspect that these memes shared was that both were a way in which people could express on social media who they wanted to single out in a public way as friends. It was an honour or a celebration to be nominated for a #Neknomination or an #IceBucketChallenge. Those who nominated others without having been nominated themselves could be seen by members of their Facebook communities as attention seeking, or as outsiders wanting to be part of a perceived inner circle. This was evident by the way in which each individual was, in their video, expected to thank the person who had nominated them, often with a sense of feigned sarcasm, almost as if this were some kind of cruel practical joke that had been played on them. Although they had been nominated to do something unpleasant, the benefits of 'being chosen' included public evidence of being a member of a special group, especially since many celebrities were nominated. This is an example of how celebrity culture and social media mutually reinforce one another.

Celebrities are perhaps the best known personal brands, and do not need social media to enhance their personal brands. However, if one is able to share a mediated experience with a celebrity, then one could be seen as elevated, at least temporarily, to sharing their status. The fact that so many celebrities participated in the #IceBucketChallenge is evidence that social media provides a means for celebrities

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27The term 'meme' was coined by ethologist and evolutionary biologist, Richard Dawkins, to denote a unit of cultural transmission, but in internet culture it refers to an amusing or interesting video or picture spread virally on the internet. Facebook is a place where memes are common and they are usually not contextually specific or personal for the people passing them on.

to show how they are ordinary people just like everyone else. Such participation may serve to increase their popularity, but is also an example of how social media blurs the lines between celebrities and everyone else. On the 'equal' virtual playing field of social media, everyone seemingly competes for some attention. According to Barry (2008: 251):

> Celebrity culture is ideologically bound up with the condition of global capitalism in which, as Richard Dyer puts it, 'individuals are seen to determine society'. Whether this is read as being a world of 'triumphant individualism', or an alienated society in which individuals are 'battered by the anonymity of society', the individual remains 'separate, irreducible and unique' (Dyer, 1987: 87). Our behaviour appears to be guided, then, not by social institutions or doctrines, but by the example of individuals who are seen as both like and magically unlike ourselves.

My research respondents were generally aware of the #IceBucketChallenge, but very few of them actually took part, because they were generally as students unable to afford to make a donation. Participation in the #Neknomination was more extensive, because it involved the time-honoured tradition of students drinking. Indeed, being nominated was a form of social elevation and showed that the nominee was popular among his or her peers (although the #Neknomination involved mostly male students). Popularity on social networks (often in the form of attention seeking) is almost always present in the workings of online social networking sites, and in some cases can intersect with protest action.

The #Kony 2012 campaign and the #IceBucketChallenge are good examples of global activism or slacktivism, something which I have suggested is less likely to recur with the personalising self-promotional nature of Facebook. However, this may still hold true for an intervention such as the #IceBucketChallenge, because it involves self-promotion and slacktivism, since one is expected to pour ice-cold water over one's head, film it and post the evidence on social media, effectively promoting oneself without being obligated to donate to the cause. The #IceBucketChallenge was also not 'soft bigotry', as the intended beneficiaries were less distant from participants. What was interesting about the #IceBucketChallenge was the experience of inclusion in a special or popular group, which seemed to reference celebrity culture, as taking the challenge became an exhibitionist public performance. The influence of celebrities was also a major contributor to #Kony 2012's success, but it seemed to draw criticism for the alleged 'white saviour industrial complex'.

Profile Picture Protest

Words on Facebook can be important for expressing oneself through comments and status updates, but pictures are perhaps even more important, given the constant competing flow of information.

Pictures can have a more memorable impact than words can. On Facebook, one's profile picture is of the utmost importance28, since a profile picture is a personal representation. Profile pictures are also displayed when a Facebook profile shows who constitutes an individual's 'friends', or which 'friends' will attend a publicly mentioned event, which the individual has themselves indicated an interest in attending29. The profile picture has become a space where an individual can show support for various causes. The profile picture can also be used to express solidarity (e.g. a French flag filter), outrage or to show one's opinion on an issue (e.g. a green profile picture). The French flag filter as an overlay was prompted after the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, to show solidarity with the French people. Discussion of both of these examples follows below.

The earliest example (in 2013) of the use the profile picture – which I examined - for protest involved changing one's profile picture to a green square, as a gesture of support for the visual artists who worked on the blockbuster film *The Life of Pi*. The film won an Academy Award for best visual effects, but the company responsible for the visual effects, Rhythm and Hues*,* filed for bankruptcy and 250 artists responsible for the Oscar-winning work had to be retrenched. Facebook users changed their small square profile pictures to solid green blocks, as shown in this post:

The solid green blocks that were in protest used as Facebook profile pictures were inspired by the green screens used by filmmakers during filming and production. Green screens are used in a process called keying, which involves filming actors performing in front of a green screen, with the green background removed in post-production and visual effects artists replacing it with visual details to bring the film to life.

28Facebook is automated and static compared to earlier social networking sites, so the profile picture is an important space for self-expression, as other aspects of the profile have become standardised.

29Who one is pictured with in one's profile picture can for some be a gesture of preference, for instance "These are the friends I want to be seen with now" or "These are my best friends".

During the 2013 Academy Awards ceremony when Bill Westernmost, the visual effects supervisor for Rhythm and Hues, went on stage to collect his Academy Award, in his acceptance speech he tried to speak about the dire plight of people working in the visual effects industry. However, his microphone was turned off and the theme music from *Jaws* was used to drown out his speech. In a subsequent press interview Westenhofer said[30]:

> What I was trying to say up there is that it's at a time when visual effects movies are dominating the box office, that visual effects companies are struggling. And I wanted to point out that we aren't technicians. Visual effects is not just a commodity that's being done by people pushing buttons. We're artists, and if we don't find a way to fix the business model, we start to lose the artistry. If anything, *Life Of Pi* shows that we're artists and not just technicians.

Because I am a trained visual artist, at that time saw a lot of my former classmates change their Facebook profile pictures to green. I was also part of a larger community on Facebook that focused on digital art. Many people in the digital art community with whom I interacted online participated in the protest. The protest did not seem to have a great impact as other friends who are not linked to visual art circles had no idea that this protest was happening. This is evidence that although Facebook can make communication and dissemination of ideas possible, if something is of interest to a group specific, the gap between two interest groups is not easily bridged, even if such communication is on a global scale.

I saw the effect of the protest first hand, because when I looked at my Facebook page, I saw a ubiquitous and global protest, with a large proportion of my friends and others shifting to green profile pictures. This example also hints at the risk of equating one's experience on Facebook with one's personal experience of real events in the world at large. This was a limited, niche protest, and the film industry and the Academy of Motion Pictures, in contrast, were seen as underplaying the extent and importance of the protest.

The green profile picture is an example of a simple protest that had no noticeable impact. Ultimately visual effects artists are underpaid, for their artistry is of little concern to anyone other than visual effects artists themselves, in comparison to the actors and directors in the film industry. This example also reflects a culture where celebrities and the faces of an industry are valued more than the other craftsmen and women who make the 'magic' of much of the blockbuster film industry possible. Social media like Facebook can be seen as a symptom of this superficial value system, because of its preference for a mediated celebratory representation of self. Facebook did not itself initiate this

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[30]http://articles.latimes.com/2013/feb/25/entertainment/la-et-ct-visual-effects-protest-20130225

superficial approach, nor can it be blamed for the inequality endemic in 'celebrity culture'. However, it can be seen as a symptom of the superficiality of celebrity culture as it becomes a site to enable a mediated broadcast of our own micro-celebrity. It can thus be seen as perpetuating celebrity culture. According to Driessens (2012: 642):

> The social function of celebrity discourse is not a given and must first be empirically corroborated. Not everyone thinks that celebrity culture is important, just as it probably does not enable a general community feeling. Still, our attention is incessantly drawn to the discourse and performances of celebrities, which makes them at least a recurring reference point for people's social practices.

Clearly many people who are members of Facebook do not see themselves as celebrities, but the mechanisms which govern the site, such as the like-economy, mean that the ethos of the celebrity prevails in terms of measures of popularity and reach of message. It is a manifestation of celebrities today that they are known for being known and not much else.

The fact that the protest described above did not become visible outside of a small niche group is a symptom of the insular nature of Facebook.

Altered profile pictures have also been used to show support for the LGBTQ community. Firstly, a trend developed which involved replace one's profile picture with a pink 'equals' symbol on a red background, which conveyed a message of support for the legalisation of same-sex marriage, an issue which was to be debated in March 2013 by the United States Supreme Court. An organisation called the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) urged people to change their profile pictures in this way to show their support for marriage equality, i.e. that same-sex marriage should have equal status to heterosexual marriage. In March 2013, three million Facebook users changed their profile pictures accordingly.[31] The show of solidarity was also visible among South African Facebook users, especially those who sought to campaign for LGBTQ rights. In South Africa marriage of same-sex couples has been legal since 2006.

In June 2015 Facebook decided to develop an application for mobile smart phones and desktop computers called 'Celebrate Pride'. The application would place the rainbow coloured flag, associated with LGBTQ pride, over an existing profile picture. The ease of using the app, as well as the fact it that did not involve changing an existing profile picture meant that this strategy to show support for LGBTQ rights was more widely adopted than the previous pink-on-red equals symbol campaign. In the

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[31]https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/06/were-all-those-rainbow-profile-photos-another-facebook-experiment/397088/

weekend after the launch, 26 million people updated their profile pictures with the rainbow flag overlay, and there were more than 500 million interactions with these new photos.[32]

The fact that the Celebrate Pride filter could be applied on the Facebook site meant that Facebook could accurately measure the extend of its adoption. The development of the app showed that the Facebook company was prepared to show its support LGBTQ rights. The Facebook site also had evidence of contrary, anti-gay sentiment on public comment boards. Such 'politically incorrect' views were prominent later in commentary on the #FeesMustFall protests.

Celebrate Pride showed that Facebook was unafraid to express its views on a contentious issue such as same-sex marriage, or to ally itself with one party in the debate. In promoting something like same-sex marriage Facebook branded itself, and with a certain ideology. What this does is express Facebook's assumption of agency for how it represents *itself*. There are other examples of this, such as many Facebook messages expressing 'caring about you' to its users. Through this Facebook wants to be seen as more than just a technical framework to enable easier connection between people, but almost as a meta-friend, actively caring about its users and certain social issues.

The problem with this view of Facebook having agency is through showing how they care, and trying to enrich one's experience, Facebook curates the content which is seen on the site. Then advertising is slipped in more easily between posts and shares from one's friends, and by suppressing content that is not in alignment with certain views, Facebook creates filter bubbles. As with the example where the green profile picture, for some, could make it seem like the protest was far more widespread than it was, filters can exacerbate this with providing a certain sameness of content based on what one is most likely to click (Pariser, 2011: 10):

> The basic code at the heart of the new Internet is pretty simple. The new generation of Internet filters looks at the things you seem to like—the actual things you've done, or the things people like you like—and tries to extrapolate. They are prediction engines, constantly creating and refining a theory of who you are and what you'll do and want next. Together, these engines create a unique universe of information for each of us—what I've come to call a filter bubble—which fundamentally alters the way we encounter ideas and information.

The problem with protesting in a bubble is as we saw with the green profile picture protest, one is never sure about the reach of the protest. This is a strange contradiction in that Facebook is seen as a public space to voice opinions, and so people may use it as a protest medium. The algorithmic filters on

Facebook mean that those who protest about a specific cause are more likely to be seen by those who already agree with them than by those who have opposing views. This raises questions about the function of protest in the context of social media. The use of changed profile pictures can then be seen as showing one's allegiance, being part of something, or marching campaigning under a message – 2015 was in interesting time in which Facebook endorsed colours under which people could march. First was the gay pride flag, but later the French flag was adopted. Firth (2011: 342) argues that:

> because a flag is cheap to make or buy [in this case free!], easy to manipulate, observable by numbers of people at once, it is a prime vehicle for conveying attitudes towards a social unit of which one is a member, or expressing other sentiments. Hence there is opportunity for personal identification with the symbol which can give added force to its use.

Perhaps the best known use of flags for profile pictures on Facebook happened shortly after the terrorist bombing in Paris on 13 November 2015. Facebook made it possible for users to overlay their profile pictures with the French flag to show solidarity with the French people and to arguably appropriate the French flag as an anti-terrorist (or even as an anti-Muslim) symbol. The Facebook site had the following message for users: "Change your profile picture to support France and the people of Paris." However, Facebook was soon criticised because it had not made possible to show solidarity with victims of other recent terror attacks in places such as Kenya, Beirut or Syria.

It was interesting how many people were willing to use the French flag overlay to convey solidarity. South Africans who had no obvious connection to French culture changed their profile pictures to incorporate the overlay. In using the French flag, Facebook seemingly tapped into a growing wave of (ethno-) nationalism, and arguably this provides encouragement to those prone to nationalistic tendencies, and who see France as an ally in an anti-terrorist war (and for some an anti-Muslim war too). In fact, by providing the French flag as a pop-up option as one logged in, it can be argued that all

Facebook users were encouraged to change their profile pictures to incorporate the overlay. This can be seen as an experiment by Facebook to determine which users respond to suggestions by Facebook, and which do not respond, enabling some understanding of Facebook's direct influence on users' behaviour.

The French flag might also be seen as promoting a Western narrative of 'us versus them', since utilising a Western country's flag definitely suggests a Western orientation, not just a message of 'I am anti-terrorism', but also 'I support the West'. This seems to be the underlying cultural imperative with this form of ideological branding by Facebook, and aligns with the myth that no recent protests or democracy would have been possible if the protesters had not utilised the Western liberating technologies of social media33. This was made evident when I was told that "protests are just to be put online". What Facebook can be seen as doing in singling out the French flag is reminding the rest of the world that Facebook aligns with European culture. Whatever its motivations for adopting the overlay, the tool provided Facebook with very valuable data in terms of 'computational politics'. According to Tufeki (2014: 1):

> *Computational politics* refers to applying computational methods to large datasets derived from online and off–line data sources for conducting outreach, persuasion and mobilization in the service of electing, furthering or opposing a candidate, a policy or legislation. Computational politics is informed by behavioural sciences and refined using experimental approaches, including online experiments [French Flag Filter], and is often used to profile people, sometimes in the aggregate but especially at the individual level, and to develop methods of persuasion and mobilization which, too, can be individualized. Thus, computational politics is a set of practices the rise of which depends on, but is not solely defined by, the existence of big data and accompanying analytic tools and is defined by the significant *information asymmetry*—those holding the data know a lot about individuals while people don't know what the data practitioners know about them.

For Parisian journalist Lucy Kroening, what is interesting about the French flag is that "many French citizens have come to see waving it publicly as expressing support for France's extreme right, and for their anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant and racist policies".34 The use of such symbols can contribute to a global sense of the entrenchment of ideas of narrow nationalism for France and by extension other nations in the West. This phenomenon is an example of 'computational politics' (Tufeki, 2014). Most people who changed their profile pictures to incorporate the flag did not think extensively about the issues behind the violence. Their decisions did not merit that much thought. One of my Facebook friends told me, "It was a simple way to be involved in current affairs and show I care." (I thought,

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33When reading some reports and accounts of the Arab Spring, the narrative often becomes, 'They could not have done it without the democratising factors of Western social media,' and so there is a myth that Arab spring protesters really just have Western internet social media to thank for being able to stand up to dictators.
34https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/11/18/the-problem-with-putting-a-french-flag-up-on-your-facebook/?utm_term=.927e680cb0a5

"Told you care".) Ultimately, Facebook turned the human tragedy into a trend, a way to feel that one has supported a cause or stood up for something (without actually doing anything specific to help the affected people). The fact that one is the type of person who shows they care and stands up for things becomes part of one's personal brand.

What was remarkable about this trend, as for Celebrate Pride, was that it was initiated by Facebook, this means that Facebook was comfortable enough to champion these particular causes itself, and not merely provide an impartial platform or utility on which causes could develop organically out of users' interests to form organic collectivities. What this references too is a flattening of creativity, because it would be easy for anyone with an internet connection to make the overlay themselves if they knew how, and perhaps even set up a third party website which provided the same service. This could have been a solidarity movement growing organically, but the fact that Facebook wanted to offer it within its own interface speaks to the way it felt that it had at the time licence to promote causes (even if fraught with controversy) or companies (in terms of advertising).

Causes supported, activism, solidarity and pride now have to be Facebook sanctioned. There is no question of the social ubiquity of such a display, as there was with the green profile picture. And with the response to the prompt Facebook can probably infer which groups or subsets of users feel the need to be overtly, conspicuously 'anti-terrorist' or 'pro-French'. More importantly perhaps it provides Facebook with rich data regarding who view their profiles as a context in which to make such a public statement, and who sees their profile as a more private personal space (Pariser, 2011).

The interesting aspect of these filters was that they were very 'public' representations of social activism, which Facebook seems to have now deliberately moved away from. Evidence for this is provided in Chapter 5, where 'privacy fetishism' is discussed. However, in recent years, the world has become more divided, and Facebook is used as a litmus test for ideological influences that interested parties *pay* Facebook for. They have specific target audiences in mind, so, by isolating people in silos of privacy, political and ideological actors can target their messages to specific people, and have greater success than if such messages were disseminated publicly, or in the same public vein as the examples of activism mentioned in this chapter refer to.

Conclusion

The fast-paced 'news cycle' of social media and especially Facebook becomes a stream of personal updates from friends, general news and advertising, all interconnected. This means that people are

encouraged to have more of a personal attachment to their news, and consumer brands want to be seen as 'your friend'; the idea of personal news, advertising, satirical or fictional writing all *finding* you, rather than the process happening in reverse. Automation is increasingly the design, and for social activism it makes participation very easy: to share information or to get behind a cause is as easy as clicking a 'like' or 'share' button. This then becomes a public display, or as public as one has access to, which as I have identified already, can be much more insular than one thinks. One can have the emotional gratification of supporting ten different important causes before lunch. One will be safe in the knowledge that these were the causes chosen *for one*, and they must, therefore, be relevant, because of a complex matrix of algorithms and 'friend' choices which created the particular feed. If one finds that a cause is no longer 'the one' anymore then there will be something new after lunch. The disconnection of the consumer environment can thus pervade news, activism and friendship. News is consumed as entertainment, as is activism, often at the expense of objectivity. Groups of 'friends' become at once increasingly connected through their apparent collective support of specific causes – which seemingly creates a more 'social' engagement with activism, and causes, but paradoxically creates the sense that they are personally consumed, and become personal badges of identity. This in fact insulates causes from a concept of a truly public sphere, or "space of autonomy" (Castells, 2015: 2), as was seen with the apparent invisibility of the green profile picture protest. Langman (in Shields, 1992: 62) comments:

> In an amusement society of unending, disconnected simulacra, the presentations of self and interaction rituals, regulated by commercial codes and affective cues as surface manifestations of socialized desire, intersect in the routines of everyday life. Commodified desires and images are the strings regulating a puppet show of self.

We become the consumers of our 'social' reality – presented as tangible fact by the reification of connection afforded by Facebook – this means that social reality has become a commodity provided to us, not something we produce and work to achieve. For some people, and for some issues the only meaningful option is sharing of information, the only option in terms of response is 'slacktivism'. However, there is no absolute guarantee that all 'news articles' on Facebook are true; this has left users feeling rather despondent and reluctant to 'spread awareness' of large global problems. Others argue that if online activism is to be done, it should be closer to home, and involve a situation where there is the possibility of making a direct difference.

Information empowers people, and connection means that people can share important global issues. However, there is a sense of the infinite in the news feed, an endless stream of content. Meaningful action needs to be undertaken close to home if one is to see any meaningful outcomes. In all this noise there are two constants: the guiding hand of the meta-friend that is Facebook itself, and the representation-of-self that is the personal brand. When the representation-of-self meets activism,

politics ensue, and brands that want one to buy their products are positioned as friends, with social issues having to be managed diplomatically.

Much social media based protest seems to be a peculiar mobilisation of social and ideological uncertainty, seeking to take a fluid post-modern conception of self and somehow solidify or galvanize it behind a cause or idea. Confusion, uncertainty, and a desperate need to be heard often bedevil new protest movements, and after a while their proponents return to everyday life without having reached their goal. People are also bombarded with information demanding their attention. Here I refer more broadly to the examples of impersonal or distant online protest native to Facebook and not to the enduring, if fluid demands of the "Fallist" protesters. Online protest is seemingly ever more fleeting, and perhaps less common than it once was. Political engagement has flourished in a neoliberal method of conspicuous consumption and personal branding. Given this context, and despite claiming to be 'free' and 'open' – once touted as 'democratic', offering a platform for communication, Facebook has become a space where users want to assert their views and to be heard, and face minimal challenge or disagreement.

I point to a neoliberal sense of freedom and personal branding for this as one should always appear contented, and not be in the wrong. This is perhaps one reason for slacktivism, to be non-committal or to not necessarily follow up with a cause, as it might be proved incorrect. Hence supporting a cause may damage one's 'personal brand' and this I suggest can impede organic collective action. This is best evidenced by #Kony2012, where despite the nobility of the cause, the campaign arguably did more to expose the questionable practises of an NGO than to help anyone suffering at the hands of warlord Joseph Kony. The nature of social media sites is that such sites promote an ethos of self-promotion, and encourage activist practices which promote the personal brand arguably more so than promote collectivity. Hence the #Kony2012 incident should be a warning to anyone wishing to 'invest' themselves in 'slacktivism' with a socio-political undercurrent and stick to more of an isolated self-sufficiency. Other examples of successful online activism have also been reported, including Facebook support for LGBTQ rights and showing solidarity with France following terrorist attacks, as well as the #IceBucketChallenge.

It appears that Facebook has become the curator of one's personal brand and acts as a gatekeeper for what type of conspicuous protest activities are legitimate. I draw this simple conclusion, because #Kony2012 failed to bring about meaningful change. On the next occasion when someone tries to

raise awareness for a similar cause people may be increasingly sceptical of distant causes, and this may lead to a further desensitisation to, and objectification of distant suffering.

Through social media a large number of people are now conspicuously able to consume or autonomously create ideologies. However, being too 'ideological' can alienate others. Challenging people regarding their ideologies may be seen as a personal attack, which I argue has led to 'privacy fetishism'. The conspicuous consumption of ideology as a form of identity in an uncertain world, is made more uncertain by the infinite sea of information and countless opinions available in the new online mediascape. What tends to be slowly produced is a rise in nationalistic and polarising tendencies. There is a need for familiarity and for a sense of belonging, which a site like Facebook provides with various degrees of insulation through the use of privacy settings. Perhaps the nature of being confronted with such a vast sea of information has led Facebook to create an artificial sense of insulation and containment, in order for users to feel more comfortable on the site.

The fact that people can find their voices on social networks is often hailed as a triumph or seen as a great benefit of modern technology. However, modern technology and the progress that has been made does not automatically translate into social terms. There may be a scientific solution to a problem, for instance, how to connect 10 million South Africans to Facebook on mobile devices, but questions about the 'social' effects of such a connection are much more complex and harder to answer. The current ubiquity of social networking sites means that they are seen as if they provide consistent scientific processes. However, such sites are just another way to communicate. I contend that a platform such as Facebook can have consequences with regard to how protests and protest movements are understood, both from within and from the outside.

Social networks are still relatively young. Facebook has been used a great deal for protest, because it provides an easy way to communicate with others. However, Facebook will not necessarily support an ideology that does not have the support of the majority, for example it chose to show solidarity with the people of France instead of trying to raise awareness about all terror attacks which happened around the world. This has a great deal to do with market pressures and the users from which Facebook derives its revenue. As the Facebook population gets older, and Facebook use is extended to a greater number of people, the opacity of what Facebook does with the data which it collects and manages, determining what people will see on their news feed, will become increasingly problematic.

In this chapter, I highlighted how Facebook as a platform has been used for online protest and activism. In the next chapter I consider the impact of Facebook on recent offline student protests in South Africa, namely #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall and the related so-called "fallist" protest, which were themselves branded with the hashtag and thus geared in their very title for dissemination through social media.

Chapter 3: Protest Moves Offline

This chapter focuses on how offline protests and social activism manifest on Facebook, which plays a certain role in protests because of ease of communication and the fast speed at which messages can be disseminated. Access to Facebook means that information about protests can be published by protesters themselves. In recent times, starting in Tunisia and Iceland and continuing with protest movements such as the Arab Spring and #OccupyWallStreet in 2011, there has been a trend towards networked protest action, in which social networking websites like Facebook are a major mobilising factor. "Social media have made what took years of careful planning occur in weekends, accelerating the rate of change. Having a peer-to-peer organizational structure [means that protest no longer need a hierarchy or leader, but rather seem reflect a collective will.]" (Inayatullah, 2011: 36).

In the USA social media have been seen as a great liberating factor (Morozov, 2011: 4):

> Mark Pfeifle, former deputy national security advisor in the George W. Bush administration, launched a public campaign to nominate Twitter for the Nobel Peace Prize, arguing that "without Twitter, the people of Iran would not have felt empowered and confident to stand up for freedom and democracy."

In this study I examine Facebook rather than Twitter, but the praise in the Western media for both is similar. Facebook is seen as an organisational tool, whereas Twitter is seen as a site where uncensored and live news is Tweeted by protesters in the protest action. The boundaries of these two social media giants become blurred as posts are often made to both simultaneously. The value of social media is that it is a great democratising force that can give people immense power. Mass social media sites provide a sense of power, and the ability to communicate instantly and too many people is seen as the victory in itself. Facebook is the biggest of these sites.

The hype about 'media power' being put into the hands of every person creates a situation where the outcome of protests appears, at least online, less important than the moment of the protest. We must not forget that the idea that Western technologies are tools for emancipation and democracy, tends to neatly belie any counter argument that social networking sites are becoming tools for exploitation through pervasive surveillance. Given certain characteristics they may divide people as much as connect them. According to Van Dijk and Poell (2013: 3):

> The logic of social media, as was previously the case with mass media logic, is gradually dissipating into all areas of public life; the cultural and commercial dynamics determining social media blend with existing commercial and advertising practices, while also changing them. Far from being neutral platforms, social media are affecting the conditions and rules of social interaction.

In 2014 South African university students started social media-branded protest with the #RhodesMustFall movement. The link between South African student protests and the global trend towards socially mediated protest is made clear in the way that the "Fallist" protests were branded with the hash-tag[35]. The wave of South African student protest has continued (until the time of writing in 2017). There has been a call for student voices to be heard and social media is seen as giving students a voice. According to Booysen (2016: 45):

> The revolt demonstrated how students, united through mass action and facilitated by social media could, within a week, escalate issues of free higher education from university management level to a national presidential level – and get results.

Students also created a "fully developed network" (Booysen 2016: 14). Protests were countrywide, and at times resulted in a simultaneous shut down of institutions across the country. This would not have been possible without the social media enabling the 'Fallists' to co-ordinate and perpetuate their strike action in the "space of autonomy" of online social networks (Castells, 2015: 250), away from government and institutional influence. The social networking sites of Facebook and Twitter allowed 'Fallist' protests to be both nodal and mimetic across the country. In this chapter I will examine the three-year wave of student protest. I then move on to an examination of how the protests of the 'Fallists' played out on social media, comparing them to two other well-documented protest actions, namely the #ArabSpring and #OccupyWallStreet.

Manuel Castells (2015) extolls new forms of networked public power, proclaiming that "suddenly dictatorships could be overthrown with the bare hands of the people". Castells examines networked protests and two protest actions that the #FeesMustFall protests have subsequently been compared to in the media, the Arab spring wave of protests and the #OccupyWallStreet protests. These two waves of protest involved the mobilisation of thousands to stand up for a cause that greatly affected them, and were much easier to organise because of Facebook (and Twitter).

Protest in real space is different to protest in virtual space, since in real space the protester has to be much more committed owing to higher risks, as Zeynep Tufekci (2014)[36] points out. The protest group has to be much more dedicated to the cause. While online one risks alienation or hostile comments from those who might disagree with the cause, in real world protests one risks institutionalised violence and jail, injury or death, or in the case of university student protests, injury, victimisation, suspension or expulsion from their institution. Hence a distinction needs to be made between a networked social movement and a protest movement. This does not mean that Facebook is

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[35]A word or phrase preceded by a hash sign (#), used on social media sites such as Twitter to identify messages on a specific topic.
[36]https://www.ted.com/talks/zeynep_tufekci_how_the_internet_has_made_social_change_easy_to_organize_hard_to_win

merely an organisational tool for protest action. On the contrary, it provides a platform for mobilisation and dissemination of ideas through which a networked social movement can evolve into a protest movement. A protest movement can also gain momentum through contact with online social networks on Facebook. Ultimately both social and protest movements consist of groups of people and these groups are often fluid in nature, according to Turner (1985: 22):

> Groups are neither simple nor enduring: they are composite, consisting of leaders and led, factions, segments, coalitions of sub-groups, dividing and uniting with reference to ever-changing issues and interests. Members leave them; recruits join them. The prepositions change over time: those we are "with" or "for" today may become those we are "against" or moving "away from" tomorrow. Time makes friends foes, foes friends, lovers indifferent, divorces spouses and espouses divorcees. Groups split, like cells in nature, and splice with the splinters from other groups. Our sociability is mutable though we yearn for permanence. We also seek to rest our restless minds in meaningfulness.

The Rise of the #(...)MustFall Protests

Social media has played a major role in recent student protests across South Africa. Protests started with the #RhodesMustFall protests calling for the universities in Grahamstown and Cape Town to discontinue honouring the contribution of Cecil John Rhodes to their institutions. Rhodes was a nineteenth-century politician and British colonialist, who believed in the inherent inferiority of black Africans. He passed early racially oppressive laws that became the foundation of the apartheid system in South Africa. However, he also left extensive legacies for university education in South Africa. Rhodes' legacy has thus been a bitter one for many black South Africans. Students at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and at Rhodes University in Grahamstown carried out their protests by defacing statues of Rhodes on their campuses, vandalising them with paint, setting them on fire, and throwing human faeces at them.

The defacing of statues by the #RhodesMustFall movement was documented on Facebook, and led to polarisation of student opinion. Many comments by friends and most university students expressed some understanding or support for the students' cause, but deplored the violence and destruction of property. When a protest becomes violent it is easy for those who disagree with the cause to vilify it on social media. Conversely, if protests are peaceful and without any violent incidents, because of the theatrical nature of 'news' on social media, protests are unlikely to elicit much attention. Images of police confrontation, violence, fire and vandalism are a greater spectacle than peaceful images, and so get more shares and comments on Facebook. Hence protests are subject on Facebook to the dynamics of the 'like-economy' (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013).

Following the #RhodesMustFall campaign a new type of protest[37], namely the #FeesMustFall campaign, began countrywide. The new campaign's main demand was that there be no increase in university student registration fees. Student protesters initially garnered widespread sympathy, given that university fees were unaffordable for the vast majority of the population, and the South African government allocated less in terms of funding to higher education. According to *The Daily Maverick*, "Currently, levels of public spending on universities sit at around 0.8% of gross domestic product (GDP), which is low by global standards."[38] The #FeesMustFall campaign was widely praised as students taking control of an unjust situation (Cele, 2016).

At the end of 2015 the #FeesMustFall movement earned extensive praise on social media, as the students' cause was generally seen as just, and protesters were united and for the most part peaceful. South Africans living outside of the country also expressed their support through somewhat sentimentalised posts on Facebook:
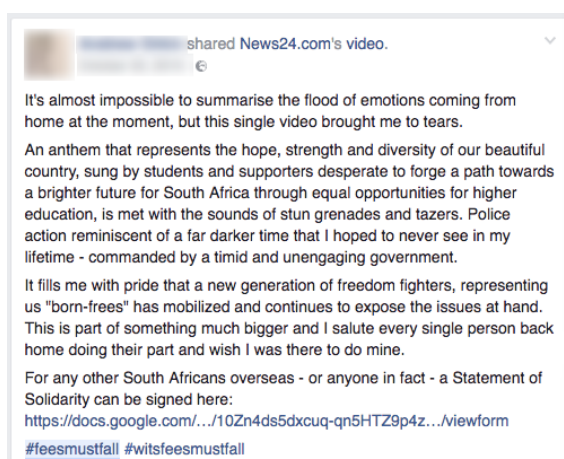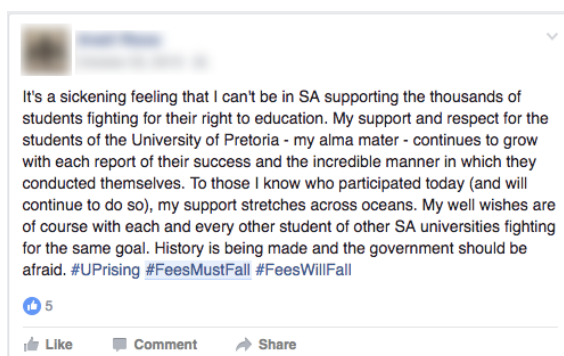
The video referred to in the second post was made as "hundreds of students singing the national anthem breached the Parliament precinct perimeter", with protesting students being forced back by

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[37]An interesting aspect of the "Fallist" protest is that when a new demand emerges it a new hash-tag or sub-movement within the "Fallist" general movement is generated. The three main movements were #RhodesMustFall, #OutSourcingMustFall and #FeesMustFall. The nodal nature of these protests means that although the original #RhodesMustFall protesters claimed all the protests fell under their own banner, each was a cause to rally around rather than a structured protest movement, and this led to diverse and sometimes changing sets of demands.

[38]https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-10-21-university-fees-free-higher-education-is-possible-in-south-africa/

police officers using stun grenades and tear gas.[39] The juxtaposition of peaceful singing students and violent, authoritarian police officers is very striking.

Many posts on Facebook from people outside South Africa seemed to be supportive of the student protests, often reiterating some version of 'I wish I was there'. Although such posts could be considered 'slacktivism', since support was only expressed online, those who posted seemed to feel an intimate connection to the particular student causes. For these individuals the opportunity to be on the frontline of the protests was an exhilarating idea – almost fetishizing the idea of being a 'protester' more than getting student demands met. This was not true of all posts, but it is a view which Facebook seemed to exacerbate. Nevertheless, being close to the protests and providing first- hand reports from the front line was a true victory for social media, as were digital messages of support on Facebook.

About a year later, the #FeesMustFall protests resumed in response to an announcement by the minister of higher education and training, Blade Nzimande, that there would be fee increases for students in 2017, determined by individual institutions, of up to 8%. This announcement sparked a further well-publicised battle between students and the institutions in which they were enrolled. The new wave of protests led some universities to temporarily close down. The course of #FeesMustFall protests will be continued later in the chapter.

In line with the #[something]mustfall mantra came #OutsourcingMustFall, which started at the University of the Witwatersrand around the same time as the #FeesMustFall protests. It demanded that universities stop using outsourced cleaning staff on their campuses. Outsourced staff were employed by external contractors and not directly by the university, and hence had no job security, were paid low wages and enjoyed no employment benefits, such as health care or contributions to retirement funds. The protest demanded that the cleaning staff become permanent employees of the universities and be granted reasonable employment benefits. The outsourced workers appeared to be treated as if they were members of an underclass, with connotations of racism from some #OutsourcingMustFall protesters. In early 2016 the political party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), also took up these issues. Workers and students violently protested and shut down campus operations, delaying registration at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) and at the University of Pretoria (UP).

The #OutsourcingMustFall protests received much less attention on Facebook than the #FeesMustFall protests had, which is unsurprising since the focus of the protests was on changing the working

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[39]https://www.facebook.com/news24/videos/10153863466671842/

conditions of cleaning and support staff, who are generally far less active on social media than students are. This also reflects that there is far more social networking activism among the youth of South Africa than among older (and blue collar) workers. Under the #OutsourcingMustFall hashtag there are almost no posts narrating the account of the protests as they took place, and seemingly none at all by the workers themselves.

However, some comments on #OutsourcingMustFall described it as a symptom of the continuation of oppression through 'white monopoly capital':
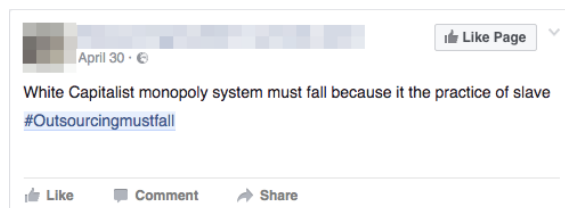
These comments foreshadowed the racial tensions that erupted in the subsequent #AfrikaansMustFall

protests, as well as the #Shackville movement. A racial dimension manifested itself on social media during the subsequent #Shackville, #RhodesMustFall and #AfrikaansMustFall protests (as will be discussed below). This racial dimension appears to have started with the #OutsourcingMustFall protests but seems to have become uglier and more prominent during the #AfrikaansMustFall protests.

#Shackville

At the beginning of the 2016 academic year #Shackville protests erupted at the University of Cape Town (UCT). The protests shocked many South African observers on social media who were confronted with images of destruction of artwork taken from the walls of UCT residences. Burning artwork fuelled a large bonfire in front of a makeshift shack on the UCT grounds, which some observers reflected was reminiscent of the Nazi burning of books and destruction of art in Germany in the 1930s.
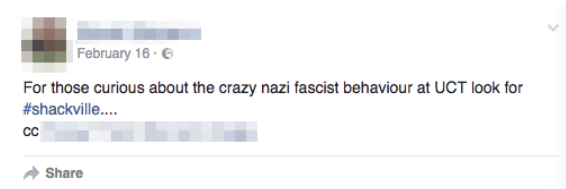
Counter argument:
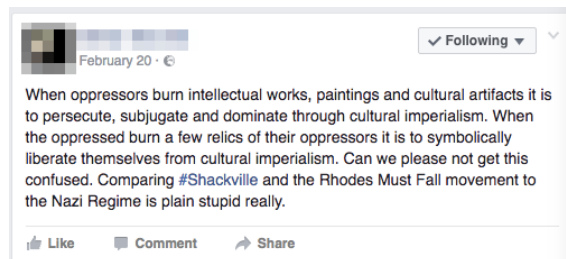
The shack from which the movement derived its name, was erected as a visual metaphor to raise awareness of the student housing shortage at UCT. Student protesters also torched two buses on the UCT campus and were subsequently subdued by police stun grenades. The protest erupted as a consequence of the UCT administration not providing enough residential accommodation for students needing housing, particularly students from disadvantaged backgrounds. #Shackville was a sub-protest of the #RhodesMustFall movement. The official justification for it by the #RhodesMustFall movement was:

> The Shackville occupation was a response to the university's "continued exclusion of black students" … At residences throughout UCT, the privilege of white students, who are not subject to the large-scale eviction or space shortages which black students face on a systematic basis, is further entrenched. This despite them being generally better equipped to find and afford accommodation outside of the residence system. Shackville is a representation of black dispossession, of those who have been removed from land and dignity by settler colonialism, forced to live in squalor.[40]

The #RhodesMustFall campaign thus championed calls for 'decolonisation', a thread running through all of the "Fallist" student protests. Many saw #FeesMustFall as a triumph of solidarity between all

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[40]. - https://www.facebook.com/RhodesMustFall/posts/1676179165990908

students. As one young woman commented, "I know that some students broke the law today, but it is FANTASTIC to see students of ALL RACES standing together in solidarity. They don't care about politics or cultural differences. They just want what is right. All people are equal."

Young South Africans seemed to be finding their place in a global world and seemingly drew strength, hope and momentum from the connections and sentiments shared on social media. Many historically white universities in South Africa were seen as bastions of continued white economic supremacy in post-apartheid South Africa, attracting better lecturers and students, thus creating a great divide between the well-resourced historically white universities and the under-resourced historically black universities, which perpetuated apartheid educational inequality. The cost and quality of education differed a great deal between these two broad groups of universities, and commodification of paid higher education was seen as reinforcing the great social inequality in the country. One reason given for whites being able to retain much higher levels of economic wealth was the neoliberal *zeitgeist* of consumerism – and in this case commodified education. Similar neoliberal economic policies had left many black graduates without the prospect of adequate employment in their chosen field to pay off high levels of student debt.

In this section and chapter as a whole I give specific examples pf how 'public' discourse on public issues manifested on Facebook during my fieldwork in order to deconstruct how the medium interacted with the 'Fallist' protests. Branded from the start with the hash-tag in their very names these protest movements state the importance of social media which manifested specifically on Facebook, as a way to create spectacle and to easily coordinate, organise and self-report protests in real time. Facebook became a space where respondents were able to voice their concerns, and opinions about the protests, instantly as they were unfolding. This instant immersion and participation seemed refreshingly empowering and seemed to give the protests a sense of momentum. Contrastingly, what I refer to as the solipsistic nature of the platform meant that at least on Facebook the act or idea of protest becomes consumed as a personal and self-referential act. Always having to either remove oneself from the cause in order to comment, or having to highlight or even fetishize one's own involvement as a 'protester'. What I mean by this and what I hope comes through in this chapter is that one's Facebook 'identity' means that when one engages with protest, it is always a mediation of the act of protest rather than just being part of a collectivity. This solipsistic sense of Facebook means that one is always the centre of one's social engagement. This meant that There was often not a sense of 'togetherness', but rather a sense of 'choosing sides', one seems always to be either 'for' or 'against' the protests – without a sense of it being a space for constructive discourse – any form of disagreement with something that is said or posted on Facebook is almost always seen as a personal attack. This meant that within a

movement that was ostensibly acephalous each new demand or even idea seemed to in some sense cause division.

#AfrikaansMustFall and Racial Confrontation

On 19 February 2016 a student meeting discussed the possible removal of Afrikaans as a language of instruction at the University of Pretoria (UP). UP had previously been a historically Afrikaans and white university, with a history of conservatism. However, over the preceding 25 years the University had moved with the times, and admitted increasing numbers of English-speaking white students and black students who generally did not have Afrikaans as their home language. For this reason a policy of dual-language instruction was put in place, which was still in operation when the student meeting was convened, with courses provided with Afrikaans and parallel English instruction. An almost exclusively white group which sought the retention of Afrikaans culture and Afrikaans medium of instruction at UP, called Afriforum, then disrupted the proceedings of the student meeting. On the opposing side were mostly black students who were members of the Economic Freedom Fighters Student Wing (EFFSW). Very tense and violent scenes erupted on campus over the days that followed regarding whether or not Afrikaans should be retained as a medium of instruction at the university. The academic activities at the university were then halted, and campus access was strictly controlled to prevent damage to property.

One way of understanding the opposing groups was in terms of the #AfrikaansMustFall and the #AfrikaansMustStay factions respectively. The #AfrikaansMustFall protesters, mostly aligned to the EFFSW, wanted UP, along with other historically Afrikaans universities, to stop teaching in Afrikaans. Their demands reflected perceptions that some historically white universities (particularly UP and the University of Stellenbosch) were reluctant to engage in post-apartheid transformation.

Afterwards, in June 2016 the UP administration issued an official statement that in terms of new policy English would become the only medium of instruction at the institution.

There is a long history of Afrikaans being perceived as a language of oppression, despite the fact that many of those who speak it are either coloured (mixed race) or black. It was widely perceived as having been the language of white oppression during the apartheid period. Indeed, the 1976 Soweto uprisings came about as a result of peaceful black student protests after the apartheid government imposed compulsory instruction in Afrikaans on all black school students. The student protests in 1976 were violently suppressed by the apartheid government, but contributed significantly to a revival of broad-

based opposition to apartheid, which ultimately led to the political settlement of the early 1990s and to democracy. With the birth of democracy in South Africa, some white Afrikaners saw retention of Afrikaans as a language of instruction as essential for retention of a separate Afrikaner cultural identity (Steyn, 2016).

The #AfrikaansMustFall and #Shackville movements not only brought the debate regarding transformation to the fore, but were also focal points for public expressions of racism on Facebook. The proliferation of racist rhetoric in the wake of the student protests was pronounced, and it seemed that the unity of the #FeesMustFall and other protest movements could be undermined by angry and racist remarks. Racially defined and aggressive discourse has reared its head on social media in not just South Africa, but across the Western world since the 9/11 attacks on New York, and against the backdrop of ongoing and unresolved conflict involving Islamic groups, including the Paris attacks. There has been a trend towards more divisive and polarised political discourse on Facebook. This has led some Facebook users to become much more insular in their use of the site, i.e. they 'impose their own bubble', as they perceive Facebook to be a means to connect with those close to them who share their views, ignoring broader realities, rather than a means of receiving news about the world or society at large. Facebook enables sharing of immediate and intimate emotions and thoughts, but postings also expose ignorance and deep-set prejudice.

Divisive rhetoric by different student protesters led the "Fallist" movement to splinter. It is noteworthy if a comment is posted on Facebook or other social media which is perceived to be racist or in any other way offensive, and attention is drawn to the comment, accusations easily erupt regarding either white or black racism, and the problematic post is then seen to reflect the behaviour of white or black students in general.

Below are smartphone screenshots collected and then posted as a single post, which went viral. It illustrates the overt racist responses of some white South Africans following the #Shackville protests.

Helloooo UCT, are you serious? "The university has asked homeowners to assist in providing residence" !! Who in their right mind would offer accommodation to those lunitics? I'd rather make space for 50 pigs, than onr of those demolishining baboons!
1 hour ago · Like · 👍 2 · Reply

Just carry on burning every artwork from the past. Soon all you will be left with is the present. The current government & everything they ar... is nothing.
↓ 3 new comments

geleerd of beskaaf word nie!
1 hour ago · Like · Reply

Wondering why apartheid was implemented all those years ago.
1 hour ago · Like · 👍 1 · Reply

Nou se my wtf het ons wittes met die kak uit te waai??? Dis julle ANC wat al die kak veroorsaak het
1 hour ago · Like · 👍 1 · Reply

WHITE DUDES BE LIKE

They should burn the whole place down so there is none left, then move on to the free state university and see what serious councilors do to troublemakers
6 minutes ago · Like · Reply

Why give them anything, they always set fire to it, it's their culture, if they can't pinch it they burn it, killing comes in there somewhere to, that's why we back over here, beautiful country, end of....
6 minutes ago · Like · 👍 1 · Reply

You can take savages from the bush and try to educate them but they will remain savages all their lives!!
1 hour ago · Like · 👍 3 · Reply

Why not just take away every thing put there and invented by whites. Then they can go back to what ever hole they crawled out of.
1 hour ago · Like · 👍 2 · Reply

Who on earth is going to rent to these people??? Their behavior is criminal! I never had the privilege of going to uct??? It was too expensive. !

Disgrace. Disgrace. Disgrace!!!!!!!!
1 hour ago · Like · 👍 1 · Reply

THE MOMENT YOU START FEEDING MONKEYS, THEY WILL COME BACK AND RANSACKED YOUR PROPERTY!
1 hour ago · Like · 👍 4 · Reply

They should be suspended for two weeks and failing that, expelled. That's basic High School disciplinary policy.
1 hour ago · Like · 👍 1 · Reply

Complete my word sentence. Bloody k.............s

Liewe fok
Just now · Like · Reply

We will never have a history. No wonder things are getting uglier.
Just now · Like · Reply

Also blame UCT for accepting anything that walks
Just now · Like · Reply

Idiots and the stupid monkey brains want to go study but can only behave like the brainless rubbish they are
Just now · Like · Reply

People seem to feel comfortable expressing extreme opinions on Facebook, perhaps because they imagine that only their friends will ever read their comments. A large proportion of my research respondents said that they might post a comment in the heat of the moment, but regret it shortly afterwards and subsequently delete it. This is what happened with much of the rhetoric that was posted regarding the #AfrikaansMustFall controversy. At the time students were urged, "Think before you post" and reminded that they could be held accountable in terms of the law for comments that they posted on Facebook.

Research conducted by the Pew Research Centre(Hampton, 2014) found that people are highly unlikely to express what they believe to be a controversial opinion if they think that those to whom they are talking are likely to disagree with them. However, "those who use Facebook were more willing to share their views if they thought their followers [i.e. friends] agreed with them. If a person felt that people in their Facebook network agreed with their opinion, they were roughly twice as likely to join a discussion on Facebook about this issue."[41] How does one reconcile this finding with the overt racism drudged up during recent student protests?

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[41]http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/08/26/social-media-and-the-spiral-of-silence/

My research experience was that most people are very uncomfortable when they encounter disagreement with their views or when their perspective is challenged. Calling a 'friend' out regarding racist remarks may be regarded as a personal attack on that friend, and the same principle holds true for a myriad socio-political and environmental issues. During my online ethnographic engagement, I found surprisingly little fruitful debate about any issue that was regarded as contentious. Especially when two individuals have a more distant relationship, any form of disagreement is likely to be perceived as a personal attack. The following two memes, which I found shared on Facebook, relate to this phenomenon:
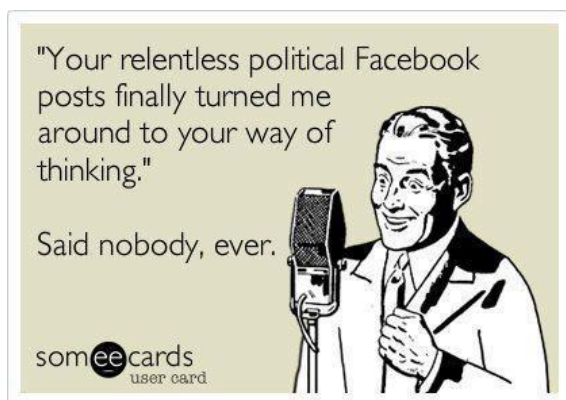
Two main points emerged from observing the use of Facebook for on-the-street and close (as opposed to distant) protest. Firstly, Facebook made the protests visible in a way that television and newspaper reporting was unable to do. Live video footage, photographic images and observations made by the protesters themselves were freely available, augmented by a wealth of comments by online observers. Secondly, posts by protesters, observers and commentators were very often self-referential, relating to their own thoughts, perceptions or actions with regard to the protests, what they would have liked to have done, or their judgements of other people's actions. Comments were often personalised or attacking. Less evident was constructive debate about the pros and cons of the student demands, or the pros and cons of their protest strategies. My observation of Facebook during the protests revealed that

any comment that appears to embody disagreement with someone or criticism of them is generally perceived as a personal attack on that person. Perhaps disagreement or criticism is seen as weakening or damaging the personal brand, rather than enhancing it.

#Feesmustfall Reloaded, The Spring of Occupation

As previously mentioned, in August 2016, the minister for higher education and training, Blade Nzimande, announced that student fee increases for 2017 would be determined by each university, but were capped at 8%. This caused a resurgence of the #FeesMustFall protests, although in a more serious form than in 2015. The hard-line protesters, generally seen as constituting a minority of student population, caused such disruption that various institutions had to close for extended periods of time, and 2016 examinations were postponed.

The #FeesMustFall protesters felt that the government had let them down. Hence there were insistent demands that all tertiary education should be provided free of charge, or no higher education would be permitted. During this wave of protests, there was extensive commentary on social media, both in support of and opposing the protesters. Views appeared to be polarised. I saw no constructive debate or considered questioning on social media. It became apparent that with regard to broader social issues, individuals go onto Facebook to make their views known. However, owing to the solipsistic nature of Facebook, any form of disagreement with such views is often perceived as a personal attack.

This round of protests focused more on the traditional media than on social media. Support for protesting students was complicated by the fact that many students were more concerned about completion of their academic year than with obtaining 'free education for all', particularly since the government had already committed to free education for the poor and the 'missing middle'[42].

It seemed at this point that the protests were a show of political force rather than a plea on behalf of the disenfranchised. Facebook was utilised when a friend live-streamed through the site a protest march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria. This meant that more than 100 people[43] could observe the march while sitting in front of their computers, or using their phones. Such dissemination of real-time footage can be regarded as a success story for Facebook. However, observation of an event from such a distance makes for a disassociated presence, which means that the actual number of protesters at the march is reduced. This was a second-hand means of experiencing the march. What was fascinating was

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[42]Students who are deemed too rich to qualify for government support, but too poor to afford tuition fees.
[43]That is about how many tuned in to this one, but there is no technical limit to the amount of people who could have tuned in.

that in my home I was able to concurrently watch the live-stream on Facebook, alongside viewing live television reporting of the march. The dual perspective of the march provided evidence that live screening is an excellent additional source of information alongside the traditional media narrative. However, it is still a mediated narrative, despite social media potentially increasing the number of available perspectives. Anyone can produce their own media and become their own media distributor. The protests then can be seen as happening in an era of "postmedia" (Castells, 2015: 123). In the context of Facebook factions emerged amongst the protesters, and there were also those who opposed the protesters. Factions tended to divide along class and racial lines.

The 2016 wave of #Feesmustfall protests have been compared to two other series of protests that, according to Castells (2015), were also influenced by the web 2.0 technologies of social media. The first series was the Arab Spring protests, when protesters called for the overthrow of absolute dictatorships in various countries and for democracy. Social media provided protesters in Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Algeria and Oman with the means to organise protests and to report on them. The protests were seen as a triumph for social media technology against oppressive dictatorships (Tawakkol Karman, in Castells 2015: 95):

> The Arab world is today witnessing the birth of a new world, which tyrants and unjust rulers strive to oppose. But in the end, this new world will inevitably emerge . . . Our oppressed people have revolted, declaring the emergence of a new dawn in which the sovereignty of the people, and their invincible will, will prevail. The people have decided to break free and walk in the footsteps of civilized free people of the world.

What is interesting is the rhetoric of walking in the footsteps of the "civilised people of the world", together with the Western myth that social media is a great emancipator and that all ills can be cured by the civilising social media voice. This is not explicitly what Tawakkol is saying, but it runs as a theme right through this dissertation: the notion that being given a 'voice' through social media will be sufficient to emancipate those who are oppressed - a myth that needs to be critically examined.

All protests around the world, especially the work of organising and disseminating information to the world, is marked by the use of social media, but each protest has its own specific features. The #FeesMustFall protests were compared to the Arab Spring and #Occupywallstreet. The reason for the former comparison is that some protesters had an anarchistic and revolutionary outlook, and they gave their government an ultimatum. If the government did not comply with their demands they threatened to make the country ungovernable. There was also a political dimension involved with some sympathetic to the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), and universities were seen as vulnerable targets for political activism and disobedience. However, at its core the #FeesMustFall movement was not

overtly political in nature, although various political parties tried to influence it at various stages. The 2016 wave of #FeesMustFall students can be seen as revolutionary in this light and students' complete disregard for authority has led them to be compared to the protesters of the Arab Spring, in which the protesters were "by and large … not mediated by formal political organizations, which had been decimated by repression and were not trusted by most of the young, active participants that spearheaded the movements" (Castells, 2015: 108). In addition, #FeesMustFall pushed forward in the face of political will and created a state of anarchy on campuses. Accusations of violence were made on both sides, and while it divided the #FeesMustFall protesters, incidents and images of violence were visible to some degree on all campuses. It was in the interests of the protesters to depict the violence on social media as the heavy-handed tactics of police and private security guards.

This type of narrative was easy to create, because a still image or short video of police violence can be shown without reference to any provocation which might have occurred. I saw footage where the students seemed to be instigators of violence, and other footage where police and private security seemed to be using excessive force. Castells (2015: 102) writes of the Arab Spring:

> What appears clearly is that once the movement engages in military violence to counter military violence, it loses its character as a democratic movement to become a contender, sometimes as ruthless as its oppressors, in a bloody civil war.

What Castells suggests here is that when a movement engages in violence, it loses legitimacy in terms of public opinion, and this was certainly a goal of those opposed to the protest who painted the protestors as violent. Conversely protesters seemed to classify all violence that they themselves engaged in as reactionary, despite the fact that on many campuses there were acts of arson and intimidation to ensure institutions stayed closed. The narrative which the #FeesMustFall students seemed to promote was that they were provoked and that campuses would have been peaceful if all police and private security forces were removed from campus. However, there is no disputing the disruptive and threatening way in which protesters would disrupt any classes going on when the movement demanded a shutdown.

Although the students' movement seems to be have been widely supported, in principle many deplored the violence and the forced shutdowns. Those who did not see violence as wrong seemed to be calling for revolution, but there was a major difference between the call for the ANC to make good on its 2007 election promises and the push for complete revolution and regime change which occurred in some countries during the Arab spring. Columnist, author and filmmaker Max du Preez had this to say:

> The subtext, the unspoken agenda, is beginning to look more and more like an effort to create a mini Arab Spring moment and to turn the entire post-1994 dispensation on its head.

> At the very least, what we're seeing on our campuses reflect a deep anger and resentment with the status quo, way beyond fees … And as the divided, incompetent government stumbles and stutters and the police act without a proper strategy – and sometimes overreacts – the protest leaders' power grew and with that their ambition to trigger a full-blooded revolution. But these guys are not taking into account that South Africa is a constitutional democracy and an open society, not a dictatorship as was the case with the Arab states. Just two months ago we had yet another election, the tenth since 1994, and only 8% voted for the party propagating revolution. Extra-parliamentary politics in a proper democracy have their limits.[44]

There was talk of some of the protesting students wanted "their own Marikana", meaning they wanted to provoke police into using excessive, perhaps even lethal force, on students so that martyrs would be created.
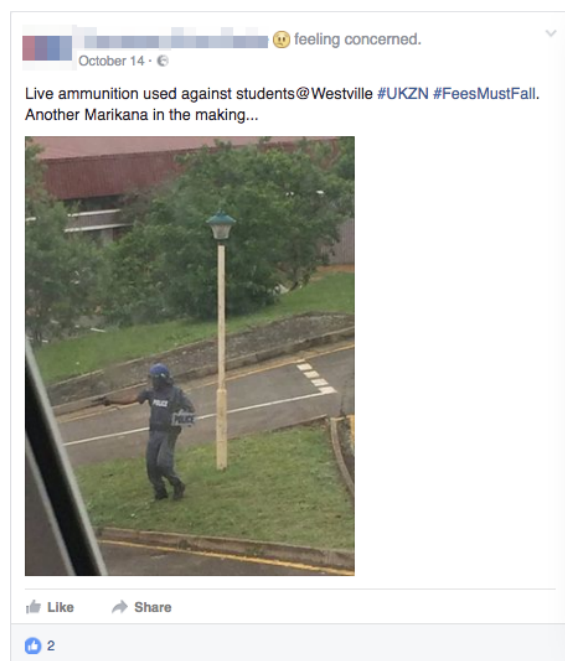

The Marikana miner protests and police reaction is a shocking example of excessive police violence. Some predicted an incident similar to the Marikana massacre, but such provocation of police was also described as political infiltration of the movement, wanting to create a situation where the state would be discredited and there would be revolution. The way in which #FeesMustFall echoes the Arab Spring is in reference in both cases to the violence of the movements having ulterior political motives. Having said that, I do not believe that the #FeesMustFall movement ever crossed the line between social force and revolutionary movement, despite much of the rhetoric which emerges online, in which some "Fallists" wanted to brand their movement as revolutionary[45].

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[44]http://m.news24.com/news24/Columnists/MaxduPreez/feesmustfall-no-longer-about-fees-20161011
[45]Many #Feesmustfall protesters do self-identify as 'revolutionary' but I contend here that they are not 'revolutionary' in the sense that Castells uses the term, because the protesters were not collectively seeking regime change in South Africa at large at this point.

Another post is shown below, after which I will move on to another protest movement studied by Castells, #OccupyWallStreet, to which the #FeesMustFall movement has also been compared.
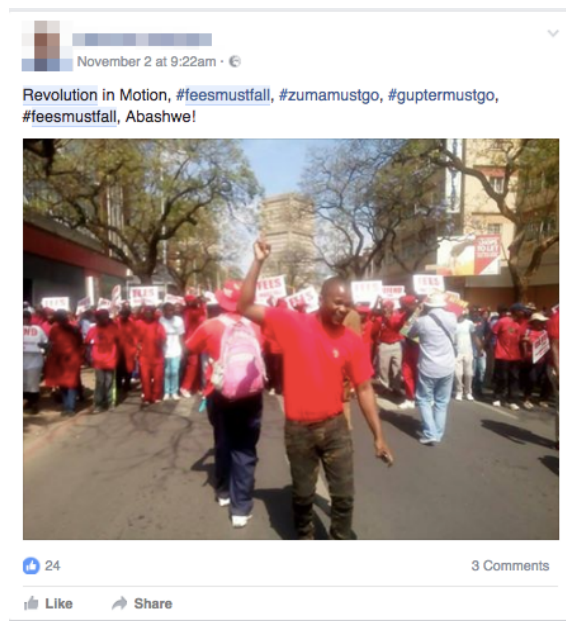
This post calls for revolution with a #Zumamustgo hash-tag, although more common was the #Zumamustfall hash-tag, which called for Jacob Zuma to be removed as president, does not make #FeesMustFall into a hard-line revolutionary movement. It shows how the hash-tag can be used to quickly reference many things in one post and how protesters core demands can get muddled by many solipsistically appealing to collectivity, each with their own slightly differing sets of grievances.

Like #OccupyWallStreet, the South African student movement was nodal, with leadership somewhat decentralised, i.e. it was 'hydra headed'. This has both positive and negative implications. One of the effects is that each iteration of the movement, each node, may have a differing set of demands. In the example given above many demands were voiced which were not core demands of the original

#FeesMustFall. Castells describes the decentralised nature of #OccupyWallStreet, which had supportive structures across the United States of America. "In fact, given the widespread character of the movement, each occupation had its local and regional specificity: "everybody brought in her own grievances and demanded her own targets" (Castells, 2015: 188). Similarly with the #FeesMustFall movement, every campus had its own relationship to "Fallism". #AfrikaansMustFall was specific to UP and Stellenbosch University, and only really affected universities which taught in Afrikaans. #FeesMustFall was countrywide but differed from campus to campus. #OccupyWallStreet ultimately failed to effect any meaningful change, and the lack of clear demands is sometimes identified as the reason for this. The same cannot be said for #FeesMustFall, since although tertiary education will not be free for every student in its current form, more is surely being done for the poor and the 'missing middle'. Generally the two movements were similar in their mimetic nature and nodal existence. The spectacle of the violence that factions of the Fallists engaged in to a large degree delegitimised the movement for many, who had been previously supportive, and the fact that the violence had a nodal and acephalous nature made it more senseless to the observer.
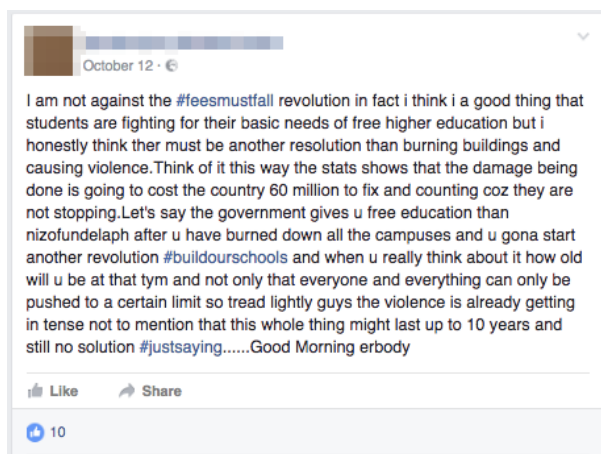
Journalist Imraan Coovadia wrote:

> The university management believes, after many weeks of fruitless negotiation, that it can appease the militant groups. Yet these groups' demands keep shifting and escalating at the last minute and would not be realisable even in a far more advanced economy. Nor is there any guarantee that a new year will go by without a similar breakdown.[46]

And this post:

[46]https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-10-13-photo-uct-friday-7-october-2016.-ashraf-hendricks/#.WYtKmHcjHv0
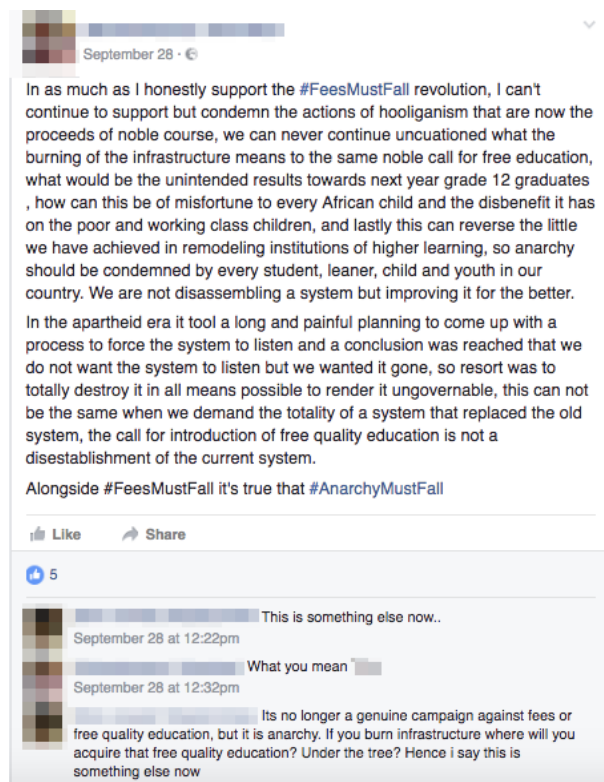
The revolutionary aspect of the movement was compounded by the high-profile arrests of some of the student leaders, which, using both social and traditional media, was able to create a cult of a micro-celebrity for a few high-profile protesters, especially those who had been arrested or who had suffered injuries at the hands of the police. Leaders participated in television talk shows. Similarly in #OccupyWallStreet (Castells, 2015: 179):

> livestreaming is in fact controversial within the movement. Because livestreamers show the occupation from their own point of view, narrating the events as they see them, many have achieved some degree of celebrity within the movement and have been identified as spokespeople by those outside of it. This has led to criticism that some are exploiting the movement for personal gain.

Protesters were able to mobilise on social media, and through detailed, up-to-date and instant communication between various nodes of the movement, a state of mimetic[47] protest was created, so if one campus shut down then others followed. There was an ethos that if one campus remained closed then it would be a betrayal of the movement for another to be allowed to open. The spates of violence and vandalism also seemed to be mimetic in nature, as if the viral memes of Facebook could determine actions in the real world. The University of Pretoria rescheduled the recess break a few weeks earlier than originally scheduled, so that at the height of the viral violence the campus was closed and largely escaped severe damage. The mimetic nature of the protest meant that across various campuses, actions

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[47]This mimetic character is another reason why the protest can be compared to #OccupyWallStreet, as well as to the Arab spring.

taken by protesters to keep campuses closed were not determined democratically. What did not spread as virally as the mobilisation to action was consensus on the demands of the movement.

This meant that the students collectively attacked the universities in a co-ordinated fashion, but the universities themselves were not in a position to meet student demands because of their differing financial realities.

According to Satgar (2016):

> #FeesMustFall was leaderless. At the same time, it had a powerful group and populist logic at work. It was a prototype of a grassroots-driven force with a leaning towards horizontality – but this did not fully mature … This weakness and internal tension of leaderlessness, existing alongside intense contestation between groups for leadership, did not provide much space for debate about strategy and tactics. Ultimately it also fed into divisions within #FeesMustFall.

Concluding Remarks

Social media like Facebook is by its nature ideal for mobilisation, but not as appropriate for constructive debate, even within a movement. #FeesMustFall is difficult to analyse through its representations on Facebook, because of its various iterations under one banner, often with contrasting agendas and demands. Facebook was useful to disseminate dates and times of protest actions. It also communicated individual experiences of the protest movement, but these are then seemingly consumed as events and moments of individual participation. This 'hydra-headed' nature of the movement was both a strength and a weakness, and works well with the architecture of Facebook is geared towards a solipsistic sense of identity, which could also be said about other grassroots and acephalous movements which used social media like #Occupywallstreet. #FeesMustFall was a South African iteration of the growing number of worldwide protests benefiting from the networked *habitus* in which people live today. While different regions differ with regards to networked *habitus* when it comes to protest, as I have shown in this section, the media has both pros and cons, but can also echo

across continents. Facebook thus invites and promotes unstructured and, as one respondent put it, "knee-jerk reactions" to what are complex and nuanced challenges.

What was once a space where fetishization of distant suffering took place has morphed into a social space where issues are depicted one-dimensionally – and ideas and standpoints become pre-packaged consumerist products rather than flexible ideas of discourse and debate.

There is a sense that sensationalism is more important than 'sense' and this may be understandable perhaps, because Facebook is a company whose revenue depends on attracting and sustaining attention, but as I will argue in the next chapter(Chapter 4), this idea becomes problematic when one company starts to monopolise as many modes of digital social communication as possible in order to create what is called the 'social graph'. Where all connections and interactions are graphed or tracked in order to create a social map of the world and the very act of protest or activism becomes hobbled by a commodity fetishism of attention. This leads to a bias towards spectacle rather than critical engagement, to which people are required to reply with their fetishized identity or 'personal brand' - a theme which I have touched on in my examination of the "Fallist" protests. Disagreement with one's views is often then seen as an attempt to damage one's 'personal brand' rather than a way to contribute to a discourse on a social issue.

As time progresses this effect seemingly compounds, and when it meets historical racial tensions, this new technology which supposedly seeks to create a more connected world seemingly is able to publicly reopen old wounds, or show the extent to which they never really healed. It then exacerbates divisions reifying them in hard virtual evidence that may never disappear. Ironically the reaction of Facebook is to retreat into a fetishism of privacy (see Chapter 5), which means that those who might disagree with one are kept firmly outside. This I would suggest, creates a strange and very complex idea of a public sphere where access to information about social is not open, but after all always available to Facebook itself. The intimate knowledge of which becomes Facebook's product, access to very specific demographics become not only possible, but purchasable for the right price. And the idea that social media, or specifically Facebook, is emancipatory and results in the possible challenge to power structures, is immediately put into question.

What #FeesMustFall did was to take on very complex, but very important challenges to the South African education system, and bring a sense of urgency to addressing them. What it also shows is a certain sense of networked herd politics, in which sensationalism is more appealing than debate or

democracy, which one might think that these new technologies could enable. We may in fact have entered a brave new world of political discourse, in which the brave and the new (the now) eclipse the calm and the rational. The dynamics of social media, and especially Facebook, seem to reflect a society of 'consumers' rather than a society of 'citizens', in which protests can be individually consumed and added to the 'personal brand'. However, the collective, and ironically the broader social dimension, seems to somewhat suffer owing to the solipsistic architecture of what has become a major source of mediated engagement.

Chapter 4: Ubiquity and the Myth of Free-flowing ('Social') Information

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I showed how these tools have been used in social activism and protest. I argued that when protest is translated into the Facebook ecology the norms and ideologies which govern Facebook have a considerable effect on the way in which protest is seen and experienced, making protest at once much easier to organise and easier to generate momentum, but much more difficult to keep focused on any specific narrative or goal. The role Facebook itself plays in the critical dialogue about contentious issues is often glossed over.

In this chapter, I will examine how Facebook appears to be attempting to create a monopoly on mediated communication. By seeking to handle more methods of communication, as well as creating new applications, Facebook sees itself as creating, or in its own way, reifying 'the social', treating the social as something which can be monitored and managed by Facebook. Normalising the reflection on Facebook of all this 'social' interaction creates *habitus*.

By examining what Facebook alludes to as its 'social graph'[48], I try to unpack what this might mean in terms of how we see ourselves and others as mediated beings. While the 'users' of Facebook are diverse and heterogeneous, owing to Facebook's vast scale and reach, the platform imposes certain limits on what being 'social' means, and seeks to mediate and reflect all social interaction. I will argue that in doing so it imposes certain norms of visibility and connectivity that I will attempt to explore in this chapter. This occurs alongside the ease of modern communication and the structural ways of expression which Facebook and other forms of social media undoubtedly provide. This has become a form of exhibitionism, where an enthusiastic Facebook user (and not all Facebook users are enthusiastic) will post in order to compete in the popularity contest for likes and responses.

In this chapter, I attempt to understand, through these lenses, and through the people and information that I had access to, how Facebook has gained the degree of acceptance it has amongst its users. (I will argue that the two threads by which it does so are that it has achieved remarkable ubiquity, and that people 'buy into' or whole-heartedly accept the notion of how Facebook constructs the social.) I

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[48]Facebook collects data from all user interactions to into on its 'social graph'. This data is then used to inform how Facebook manages the user experience and becomes the propriety asset of Facebook, a product that has made it become one of the most valuable, and arguably powerful, companies in the world.

attempt to give a glimpse of what this could mean for people who find themselves in this brave new world of an always-on mediated social, as they relate to the world and the people within it. The argument here is that the techno-utopian view of the internet as a free and ultimately democratic and open space (the kind of thinking that I assume led it to be proclaimed a human right) is under siege by the proprietary nature of Facebook as a medium. In looking at this proprietary dimension in comparison with the myth of freely accessible information, Facebook itself can be seen as a hegemonic structure for consumerism. Shields (1992: 43) states:

> Hegemony now depends on the affective gratifications provided by a mass-mediated popular culture whose themes express myriad deprivations, longings, satisfactions, aspirations and the desired experiences of particular taste cultures. There is love for the lonely, sex for the horny, excitement for the bored, identities for the empty and, typically, all are intertwined.

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> Connectivity introduces a bipolar element into the logic of social media: a strategic tactic that effectively enables human connectedness while pushing automated connectivity (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013: 8).

The internet has become a major technology informing the way people live, from speculative digital capital[49] and global flows of capital affecting everyone on the planet (Dyer-Witheford, 2010), to a complete revolution in the way that we consume media and communicate at different levels with one another. The personal computer is a widespread and essential tool for the university student of today, and many degrees and professions have computer literacy as a pre-requisite. The computer is a device which most of my focus group members and interviewees grew up with. They could not imagine a world or a social system not augmented by the use of computers (Czerski, 2012). What I wish to establishing here is the ubiquity which computers have attained in the lives of my focus group members. All of the research participants I will describe in this chapter used mobile phones, and Facebook was accessed on-the-go on these devices:

> We [the web kids] grew up with and in the internet. […] We don't 'surf' on the internet; for us, the internet is neither 'place' nor 'virtual place.' It is not an extension to reality, but part of it. It is an invisible, but ever-present layer, entangled with its bodily surroundings: we do not use the Internet; we live with and within it.[50]

Africa is relatively poor in terms of data handling, modern communications and even maintaining ownership of all of the data that it produces. Data handling processes are increasingly outsourced to large external and global companies. What this means is that companies no longer have to invest in

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[49]Linked to the concept of globalisation, networked technologies have created a situation where things like 'risk', commodities and currency can be traded globally and seamlessly through the use of the internet.
[50]https://pastebin.com/0xXV8k7k

computer hardware or information technology (IT) in order to deliver their goods and services, since IT services are increasingly outsourced. This arrangement does, however, reduce the autonomy of smaller companies and increase their vulnerability, as they are increasingly dependent on large multinational corporations to carry out some of their key functions. "Businesses in the future would just plug into the internet and get all the data processing they needed, served up by outside utilities for a simple monthly fee" (Carr, 2008: 8).

This phenomenon can be seen translated to a social and personal level through the services of companies such as Facebook, which are provided free of charge. Despite the apparent altruism which Facebook shows by providing a social networking platform which is free to use, Facebook is very much a company which seeks to make profits. Unlike the context in which businesses pay an outsourced IT company to meet its data management needs, Facebook seeks to enrich its users' social engagement by providing a platform for organisation and communication of and between individuals, i.e. social connections, with the charge made being Facebook's right to access and analyse the data trail and the footprint that users' interactions leave behind. Facebook can then over time accumulate an extensive and valuable data-base comprising the social information provided by its users, analyse the data, and sell the information derived from it to marketing companies, advertisers and other third parties, so that they can enhance their targeted advertising to consumers.

The connection between the outsourcing of data-handling functions and an ethnographic study of Facebook is that Facebook undertakes a similar process of sophisticated analysis of mediated interpersonal communication. Facebook can be seen as an opaque 'data handling utility'.

Facebook provides new modes of communication. What started out as a platform on which to retain an online profile where one shares information about one's life has mushroomed into a web of different communication technologies within the site, augmented by mobile applications, which form a Facebook 'ecology' which can send instant messages privately and 'publicly', perform voice and video calls, broadcast live video (live-stream), and also send voice notes, all from a mobile phone or computer connected to the internet.

One possible notion of how this changes is that one's Facebook profile becomes one's identity, a performance and one's personal brand. One no longer has to set foot in a shopping mall in order to conspicuously consume. Facebook or one's friends on Facebook will show one what one needs to consume both digitally and physically in online stores. The 'meta-friend' of Facebook will provide one

with suggestions if one's real friends are not providing one with information about what one should be consuming, and one will be tracked at every point along the way, even as one leaves Facebook to buy in an external online store. This transaction benefits Facebook as the site has become the new space in which to display one's fashion identity. Obviously the consumer brands reward Facebook for their visibility, or for the detailed information that one is a potential customer. This idea of consumerist performance came through in a focus group where a respondent related how tenants who rented a flat from her parents, but were always late with the rent and pleaded poverty, posted on Facebook as if they lived a very lavish lifestyle of conspicuous consumption. Whether they made a carefully constructed fiction of affluence, or if their pleas of poverty were unfounded, this made it evident to me that certainly for some, Facebook is a space for lifestyle performance in a consumerist centric world.

The counter argument is that Facebook is a privately owned site, and that everyone on the site has supplied personal information freely and willingly. The terms and conditions that were 'agreed' to when one created a Facebook account are considered 'informed consent' to Facebook's right to do whatever it wants with the information that one provides, and the company also reserves the right to change the 'terms and conditions' at will. Facebook has even used such informed consent to experiment on its users, by seeing if it can affect their mood by showing different types of posts (Kramer *et al.,* 2014). Some may argue that the way in which Facebook has created a global multi-billion dollar ubiquitous company which offers its service for free is cyber-utopian in itself (Dahlberg, 2009). Facebook can be seen as an entity which seeks to monopolise the social internet and make more internet activity social, as well as to oversee a greater proportion of social or communicative interaction, and to monetise it in terms of the neoliberal free model in which everything is seen to be about consumption (Bauman, 2013). As our lives become ever more techno-mediated the question is whether Facebook can then impose its own ideologies and structures on our mediated communication (the prompting of the French flag filter and the Celebrate Pride filter given in Chapter 2 are examples of this phenomenon). When the question of the techno-mediated promotion of Facebook's own ideologies was broached with respondents.

A note before I continue: when in this chapter I speak of the 'social' I refer to a naturalised myth which Facebook has constructed (Bucher, 2015: 1):

> The social is not a thing or domain of reality; it does not explain, it is precisely what needs explaining. This is remarkably easy to forget, as social media platforms constantly suggest the opposite, take the social for granted, naturalize it, make the social equal happiness, inclusion, the good life.

I recognise 'the social' as a problematic construct when examining social media, and understand that Facebook, for instance, has its own conception of the term.

Facebook is the Internet

A 2012 study on perceptions of the internet in Nigeria and Indonesia showed that about one in ten of the people surveyed said they used Facebook, but 'not the internet'. Furthermore two thirds of the people in this study[51] thought that Facebook *was* the internet, i.e. they had no notion that the internet was anything other than Facebook. As someone who had had experience of the internet before joining Facebook, this seemed absurd to me. I have yet to find a respondent in South Africa to interview who does not know the difference between Facebook and the internet, but have met a few who use Facebook, but very rarely surf or search online. However, I argue in this chapter that Facebook is seeking to, or has already, to some degree, become a fundamental and dominant component of what the internet is and how people interact with it, and how they receive information.

I hope that my arguments about Facebook throughout this dissertation highlight reasons why the apparent interchangeability of the internet and Facebook constrict rather than expand online engagement in the name of making it 'social'. With reference to Nigeria and Indonesia, the idea that Facebook will provide 'the internet' to the poorest parts of the world is often seen as altruistic and ultimately beneficial.[52] In this chapter, I argue that Facebook's monopolisation of the internet can be described as a colonisation of the internet. Strikingly what Facebook is doing in the poorer parts of the world can be described as in itself constituting a neo-colonial practice. Mirani (2015) lists the countries which have been given cheaper or free access to Facebook, but not yet general data connectivity, including Myanmar, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Ghana and Nigeria. According to Mirani (2015: [o][53]):

> If the majority of the world's online population spends time on Facebook, then policymakers, businesses, startups, developers, nonprofits, publishers, and anyone else interested in communicating with them will also, if they are to be effective, go to Facebook. That means they, too, must then play by the rules of one company. And that has implications for us all.

If the Facebook ecology becomes dominant it acquires enormous influence in the socio-economic and political realms, given the company's propriety nature and opacity. Furthermore, if it is able to block, take over or emulate any African or local third world tech start-up, then the profit that could be made

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[51]https://qz.com/333313/milliions-of-facebook-users-have-no-idea-theyre-using-the-internet/
[52]https://www.facebook.com/isconnectivityahumanright
[53]https://qz.com/333313/milliions-of-facebook-users-have-no-idea-theyre-using-the-internet/

by Africans or Asians and circulated within their own economies is diverted to Facebook, perhaps the most straightforward example of what neo-colonialism by Facebook could mean. Despite the argument that connection to Facebook is better than no connection at all, John Naughton of *The Guardian* writes (2015):

> This is a pernicious way of framing the argument, and we should resist it. The goal of public policy everywhere should be to increase access to the internet—the whole goddam internet, not some corporate-controlled alcove—for as many people as possible. By condoning zero-rating we will condemn to a lifetime of servitude as one of Master Zuckerberg's sharecroppers. We can, and should, do better than that.

This chapter focuses on how Facebook monopolises the internet in geographic areas where the general population does not have unhindered access to the open internet. It serves well as an introductory idea to note that some of the most economically vulnerable in the world have already been targeted by the techno-colonial ambition of Facebook. Perhaps with reference to Chapter 2, Facebook is becoming a role-player in the 'white saviour industrial complex'.

While none of the people whom I interviewed thought Facebook was the internet, a large number admitted that it took up a disproportional proportion of their online time, and most (76%) said that they accessed it more than once a day. There was a sentiment from one respondent that drove this home, he suggested that Facebook, or in his words social media made online interaction "more fluid", more engaged with the gossip or "skinner" of everyday social and sensational life than with searching for specific things online. He told me that when in front of his computer he would have Facebook constantly open in the background and would check it every few minutes.

Today it seems that Facebook seeks to increase its presence across the internet, by buying out and controlling as many aspects of our digitally mediated communication as it can. Mark Zuckerberg said in an interview with *Buzzfeed News,* "If you're a person that just wants to share with your friends, it helps to have your friends there."[54] This comment points to why Facebook has been so successful. As Jarvis (2011) argues, who wields power today is not about who owns content or distribution, but who owns the means that affect interpersonal relationships. Facebook already has many users, most importantly, and the resources to emulate or outdo any innovation that another company might come up with, and that might then make them become part of the Facebook ecology to be used to triangulate and gather detailed information about Facebook users. Zuckerberg has spoken about the introduction to Facebook of live-streaming video. What this would mean is Facebook being able to subvert existing web services

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[54]https://www.buzzfeed.com/mathonan/why-facebook-and-mark-zuckerberg-went-all-in-on-live-video?utm_term=.oqq2Oxa8mx#.meb9PkB7ek

and ignore new ones before they are able to have an impact, by buying or copying their technology and incorporating their technology into Facebook.

This enables Facebook to diversify the type of data it collects as well as make Facebook more difficult to avoid for those who are already users of the platform. The company which first provided an application for live-streaming videos, as far as I know, is called Periscope. Once Facebook introduces such an application, it will essentially be able to monopolise live streaming, because being on Facebook is such a ubiquitous matter in contemporary culture that once Facebook introduces a new feature it does not have to do much to persuade people to try it out. This means that the barriers to entry for any competitor which wishes to operate in the social media market become increasingly insurmountable. This point was shown when live-streaming was discussed with respondents. Especially during the 2016 student protests, live-streaming became a technology that respondents welcomed and saw it as a great improvement for Facebook. However, few of my respondents had ever used a previous live-streaming application. On Facebook one does not have to even seek out a specific live-stream[55]; instead live-streams are available when one scrolls through one's newsfeed. This is a prime example of how Facebook can leverage its massive user base to achieve ubiquity, and attract users away from its competitors. Since Facebook is ubiquitous, and most people are already logged in, a live-stream on Facebook is able to reach more people than one on Periscope can, so one imagines Facebook users would be much more likely to utilise this application on Facebook in future, with the Periscope application perhaps only serving a niche market, if at all. What this means too, and this was observed by some of my respondents, is that brands and products which one 'likes' on Facebook are able to disseminate their own live-streamed adverts, which brings them more impact, because of the attraction of an advert being seen 'live'. Ultimately the revenue enjoyed by Facebook increases as Facebook profits from sending these live-streamed advertisements out to users.

Shortly before Facebook's listing on the stock market in 2012, Mark Zuckerberg claimed that Facebook was "a fabric that can make *any* experience online social" (Zuckerberg, in Van Dijck, 2013: 67). The use of the word 'fabric' refers to the goal of making Facebook a web of interconnected services rather than the basic online social networking service which is what it began as. This has been a gradual emerging trend with Facebook in recent years, and which has steadily gained momentum, viz. Facebook

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[55]An underlying theme of this dissertation is that the idea of seeking anything or anyone out on Facebook is being challenged by the way the platform is developing. This is understandable as it is obviously more profitable for Facebook to be able to push social engagement upon its users, as then it is able to better segment them and to target advertising. This may seem counter-intuitive, because if you do not seek anything out, how can Facebook infer what you like? This is because of the way in which Facebook is able to feed users a constant stream of information in their newsfeed*s*. If I use an analogy involving playing cards you might be presented by Facebook with ten cards at a time. The site make inferences about what you pick, based on your search for a specific card.

monopolising or imitating (as with Periscope) or appropriating the services offered by other online platforms and thus encouraging users to spend more time on the Facebook platform.

However, Facebook has moved beyond simple emulation and has more recently been buying up competing or alternative free communication and social media sites. Some of these applications have challenged Facebook's dominance of social media. By using this strategy, Facebook eliminates the competition. It also makes it very difficult for people to avoid using at least one of the company's applications. This strategy also gives Facebook more options regarding how it is able to construct the mediated 'social'. Although its monopoly of social media is incomplete, for those competitors it cannot yet buy out, Facebook augments its own interface to incorporate the products of other companies. An example is Twitter, which could at one time be seen as competing in the same market. A few years ago a friend said to me: "I don't do Facebook; I'm a Twitter girl." Her statement suggested that the two platforms are mutually exclusive and that each appeals to different kinds of individuals. The distinction between them was apparent as early as 2011.

Facebook vs. Other Social Media

At the time of writing, both Facebook and Twitter have reached levels of use which make both ubiquitous and serve a large proportion of the globe. They are not mutually exclusive; many people have both Facebook and Twitter accounts. Facebook is arguably more pervasive and ubiquitous, owing to features such as insisting that users supply 'real names', and requesting much more personal information. Its structure also collects far more complex information about social connections. The friend who said she was a "Twitter girl" told me that she felt compelled to open a Facebook account, as Facebook was used by one of her lecturers as the sole means of communication with students. When the course came to an end, my friend found it difficult to delete her Facebook account, and it remains open even now. Even if she never logs on to it again, the account can still create a node to provide information about her on Facebook, for example if someone she meets sends a friend request, Facebook will know that they know her. Facebook will be able to recognise her in any photos posted on Facebook or Instagram by other users, owing to advances in facial recognition software. Any consumer brand she might have 'liked' can be fed to her friends. Hence even almost inactive Facebook accounts can persist with ghostly agency.

In South Africa there are more users of Facebook than of Twitter. The South African statistics in February 2016 were: some 13 million Facebook users and 7.4 million Twitter users[56].

Twitter allows users to post short messages of 144 characters, as well as pictures and video clips. A post on Twitter is called a 'tweet'. A tweet can be shared, and is then called a 'retweet'. Anyone can follow a Twitter user. Tweets about a certain issue involve a 'hash-tag' (as described in previous Chapters). Hash-tags serve to identify the content of any post, its context, and who posted it[57]. Hash-tags are an important component of the attention economy discussed in Chapter 5. The notion of using the hash-tag in mass social media originated with Twitter before it became the norm on Facebook.[58, 59] The hash-tag enabled Twitter users to identify and draw on content of interest to them. The fundamental difference between Facebook and Twitter regarding hash-tags is that Facebook adopted the hash-tag as a way for people to rally around certain events, brands or ideas, and retroactively brand and draw attention to themselves.

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[56]From http://mybroadband.co.za/news/internet/156815-how-many-south-africans-are-on-facebook-and-twitter.html
[57]People who add many descriptive hash-tags were seen by some respondents as being overtly attention seeking, but others see this as the norm in social media.
[58]https://www.wired.com/2015/10/the-secret-history-of-the-hashtag-slash-and-interrobang/
[59]https://www.wired.com/2017/05/oral-history-hashtag/

On Twitter Tweets can commented on or 'retweeted'. A connection on Twitter is made by 'following' another person. However, the individual being followed does not have to accept the follower, and Twitter accounts can also be made private. However, unlike Facebook privacy was a later development and is not the norm. Facebook has copied Twitter's functionality by making it possible to 'follow' someone on Facebook too. If one follows someone, one will see their 'public posts' as if they were a 'Facebook friend', but private ('friend' only posts) will be inaccessible. It is furthermore possible to have a setting so that what one posts on Twitter it is automatically shared on one's Facebook page, for people who 'follow' one on Facebook, together with Facebook 'friends' who are not on Twitter.

The generally accepted distinction between Facebook and Twitter is that in contrast with Twitter, more recently Facebook has enabled more private social networks by providing many more options for privacy, to limit who sees which posts. This strategy may be a way to encourage individuals who are wary of what or who they might encounter online to become a Facebook user, and encourage socially inhibited individuals to use Facebook. Facebook has seen a marked decline in 'original posts' – the trend is towards users sharing content that originates elsewhere – such as memes, articles or videos – rather than posting about current personal experience. Facebook has also become a forum for publicising personal news, since all one's 'friends' and extended family members who are personally linked will potentially see one's posts.
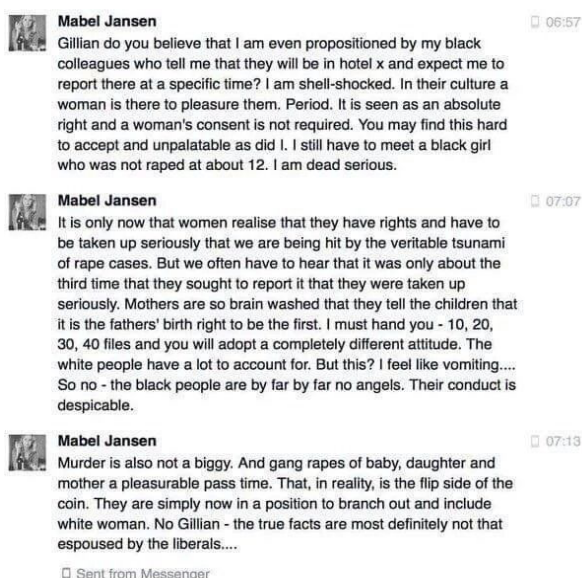
Some users of Facebook attempt to accumulate a large number of 'friends', by approaching more users to become 'friends' and agreeing to more 'friend' requests. In fact, 63% of my respondents said that they had added individuals as 'friends' without actually having personally known them outside Facebook.

Unlike Twitter, Facebook views the process of filtering content for personal relevance as a function of the platform rather than a personal choice that users themselves should be able to make. Facebook's control of the process enables it to insert selected advertising, but also to monitor how users respond to different newsfeed (Kramer *et al.*, 2014) filtering. Facebook tends towards being a robotic platform, in that it is more a mirror of users' lives than a forum for their self-expression. In contrast, on Twitter users freely choose whom they follow, rather than have options fed to them. Twitter seems to provide more opportunity to provide personal updates than Facebook does, according to two of my respondents. One respondent said "I use Twitter to see what's happening with my friends, [whereas on] Facebook I'm just there."

Instagram is another very popular social networking site. The platform is generally used on a mobile phone, although it can also be accessed from a computer. Its main function is to enable uploading of photographs and videos from one's mobile phone in the moment. Many of my respondents also used Instagram. It was, however, perceived as being a less regulated and mandatory aspect of social media, and more geared to sharing original images. Since it is owned by Facebook, it further informs and increases the ubiquity of Facebook's data collection. One's Instagram posts can be, as with Twitter, automatically reflected on Facebook.

Twitter and Instagram are mentioned increasingly in traditional mass media, and celebrities often communicate via Instagram (if the communication is intended to be completely public) or via Twitter to facilitate being quoted in public media such as on television news. For celebrities Twitter tweets have a greater public impact than Facebook status updates. However, it is interesting that inappropriate Facebook posts seem more likely to generate public controversy, with two notable examples in South Africa being Penny Sparrow and High Court Judge Mabel Jansen. It is relatively easy to forget that Facebook is a public social space, with the ultimate audience for any post potentially being the public at large. This issue reflects the perceived segmentation of Facebook, or what Pariser (2011) calls 'the filter bubble', insofar as one is fed a certain diet of newsfeed, based on one's perceived preferences and market segmentation. Penny Sparrow and Mabel Jansen thought of Facebook posts as addressing a very limited audience, but postings can be leaked by any member of their audience and find its way easily into the public domain, with unforeseen consequences.

Mabel Jansen's controversial posts follow below[60]:

> **Mabel Jansen**   06:57
> Gillian do you believe that I am even propositioned by my black colleagues who tell me that they will be in hotel x and expect me to report there at a specific time? I am shell-shocked. In their culture a woman is there to pleasure them. Period. It is seen as an absolute right and a woman's consent is not required. You may find this hard to accept and unpalatable as did I. I still have to meet a black girl who was not raped at about 12. I am dead serious.
>
> **Mabel Jansen**   07:07
> It is only now that women realise that they have rights and have to be taken up seriously that we are being hit by the veritable tsunami of rape cases. But we often have to hear that it was only about the third time that they sought to report it that they were taken up seriously. Mothers are so brain washed that they tell the children that it is the fathers' birth right to be the first. I must hand you - 10, 20, 30, 40 files and you will adopt a completely different attitude. The white people have a lot to account for. But this? I feel like vomiting.... So no - the black people are by far by far no angels. Their conduct is despicable.
>
> **Mabel Jansen**   07:13
> Murder is also not a biggy. And gang rapes of baby, daughter and mother a pleasurable pass time. That, in reality, is the flip side of the coin. They are simply now in a position to branch out and include white woman. No Gillian - the true facts are most definitely not that espoused by the liberals....
>
> Sent from Messenger

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[60]http://www.702.co.za/articles/13387/twitter-uproar-over-judge-mabel-jansen-s-racist-rape-remarks

In contrast, here is the posting by Penny Sparrow which created a public outcry[61]:

Penny Sparrow
These monkeys that are allowed to be released on New years Eve And new years day on to public beaches towns etc obviously have no education what so ever so to allow them loose is inviting huge dirt and troubles and discomfort to others. I'm sorry to say I was amongst the revellers and all I saw were black on black skins what a shame. I do know some wonderful thoughtful black people. This lot of monkeys just don't want to even try. But think they can voice opinions about statute and get their way dear oh dear . from now I. Shall address the blacks of south Africa as monkeys as I see the cute little wild monkeys do the same pick drop and litter.😊
Sat at 1:30 PM · Like · 👍 15

Profiles on Twitter are by default fully public, but can be made private, or as described by Twitter, 'protected'. In general Twitter reflects people's conscious public opinions more than Facebook does. Given more choices about privacy, Facebook posts are less often quoted in traditional media.

Facebook seems to be continually improving its 'security'. Recently a person who is not a 'friend' on Facebook commented on one of my posts, despite not having direct access to it. As Facebook morphs to attract more traffic, users are caught unawares by the unexpected consequences of such changes.

Facebook acquired the widely used personal mobile messaging application WhatsApp in 2014. According to the developer of WhatsApp, Jan Koum, the terms of the acquisition were that there would be no immediate change in how WhatsApp operated. The original business model for WhatsApp is completely at odds with that used by Facebook, since for a small annual fee WhatsApp was prepared to provide its users with an advertisement-free platform that would not track them or mine their data. Facebook probably saw the data as being more valuable than the yearly fee. However, one of the consequences of the acquisition is that:

> Facebook will now be able to link users of its own social services with WhatsApp users. It will also be able to track relative usage of its services vs activity on the messaging app, as WhatsApp feeds it engagement intel via the 'last used' signal.[62]

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[61]http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3383844/Estate-agent-forced-hiding-Facebook-post-deriding-black-people-monkeys-dropping-litter-beaches-causes-storm-South-Africa.html

[62]https://techcrunch.com/2016/08/25/whatsapp-to-share-user-data-with-facebook-for-ad-targeting-heres-how-to-opt-out/

A practical example of the acquisition is that if one sends a WhatsApp message to someone who is not a 'friend' on Facebook, then on the next occasion that one logs onto Facebook one could receive a prompt to add that person as a Facebook 'friend' despite not having any mutual friends on Facebook.

Another example of Facebook's monopoly of offline communication is the Facebook Messenger application. The app for smart phones and tablets manages Facebook chat on these devices. It would appear as if Messenger was a stand-alone app linked to one's Facebook connections. Messenger was initially perceived by my study respondents as competing with WhatsApp. Some respondents felt that they were pressured into adopting the Messenger app, since the Facebook app for smart phones and tablets discontinued Facebook chat, so users were compelled to download the separate Messenger app in order to read any messages sent via Facebook on their smart phones or tablets. Facebook appeared to have created Messenger to compete with WhatsApp. Then the Messenger app was altered so it could also manage SMS messaging on cell phones. (All SMSs would then appear as if they were sent directly via the Messenger app.) This change in functionality was sneaked past users. After the change in Messenger was implemented, on switching on their smart phones users were prompted to accept the changes as follows:
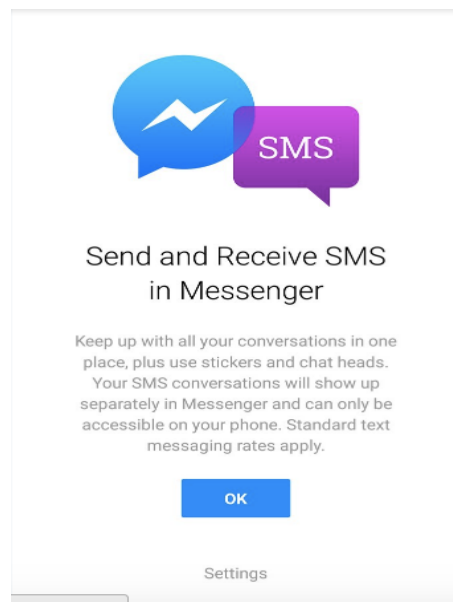
Although Facebook declared that this was a completely 'optional feature', the user was expected to tap the very small Settings button at the bottom of the screen if they did not want to accept the use of Messenger. The Settings button is clearly smaller and less visible than the large blue OK button above it. It is also far from self-evident that clicking on the Settings button is the way to decline the feature. There appears to have been deliberate intent on the part of Facebook to get users to unthinkingly accept the new feature.

Facebook denied such intent:

> SMS in Messenger is an optional feature. People can choose whether or not they wish to use it. When they first see the prompt, they can choose to start seeing their SMS messages in Messenger by turning on the feature, or they can decide not to by tapping "Settings". If they decide to see SMS messages in Messenger and to also reply to messages from Messenger, we'll ask people to approve any new device permissions that are required. Messenger doesn't modify any device settings without people agreeing to it.[63]

The Messenger's capability to deal with SMSs is only effective on Android devices (Samsung, Huawei, Sony, etc.), but not on IOS (Apple) devices.[64],[65] The fact that the change to the Messenger app seems to be mandatory, although it is not, raises the question as to whether the change to the app violates the ethics of Google Play Store (through which applications for Android devices are distributed). This is just another example of Facebook's increasing dominance, which makes being a user of, or otherwise connected to Facebook increasingly difficult to avoid.

These examples illustrate how Facebook is acting in ways that lead people to equate the platform with the internet and the company has increasing control of other social media or associated applications which provide competition (such as Instagram or WhatsApp). As Facebook extends its control, its collection of data from users is enriched further. Through such dominance of social media and other forms of connection Facebook exerts immense power and has the capacity to influence how and with whom communication takes place. Facebook's dominance may lead to the point where it monopolises communication and is able to exert an ideological influence on large parts of the globe.

While Facebook copies or acquires various modes of interpersonal communication, it also seeks to make itself an indispensable partner in other online activities. One way this occurs is through a function installed on any website that requires the user to log in, called Facebook Connect, providing new users of any site which needs a username and password with "the choice of creating an account by entering a username and a password or by simply clicking the 'Connect with Facebook' button". (Garfinkel, 2011:[o]) Through this option Facebook is able to gather additional information about other websites which Facebook users visit, informing the so-called 'social graph'. The linkage to a Facebook identity also eliminates the option for anonymity on such sites, since it is Facebook policy that one's 'real' name be assigned to one's Facebook user profile.

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[63]https://www.engadget.com/2016/06/20/facebook-messenger-sms-push-might-break-android-rules/
[64]https://www.engadget.com/2016/06/20/facebook-messenger-sms-push-might-break-android-rules/
[65]http://www.androidauthority.com/facebook-criticized-heavy-handed-messenger-sms-push-699508/

The idea that Facebook Connect gives Facebook the capability to track a Facebook user across other sites that they visit, was seldom seen as a serious issue by the Facebook users that I interviewed.

There is a comment to be made here on a form of disruption which I witnessed[66]. Before smart phones and social media attained their current saturation of the population, the website www.thunda.com (in existence until about 2014) would send photographers to raves, big parties and concerts, hundreds of photos would be taken at such events, and posted the day after the event on the *Thunda* website. Partygoers of old would go to the website and scroll through hundreds of photos, looking for images of themselves or their friends, feeling excited and happy if they found a photo (particularly a flattering one), and saddened if there was no photo to testify that they were there. This collective ritual has come to an end because everybody who attends such an event now has a camera to hand in the form of a smartphone. Hence, photos are posted on Facebook and Instagram within minutes of their being taken at events. Unless the party is branded with a specific hash-tag, there will be no collective revisiting of the event by all those who were there.

In this chapter so far, I have documented ways in which Facebook has extended its footprint by offering a more diverse and unavoidable range of services, which also increase the volume of personal data that it collects. Respondents whom I spoke to generally did not heed this or express concern about it.

As Pariser (2011: 26) points out:

> Facebook made it possible to press the Like button on any item on the Web. In the first twenty-four hours of the new service, there were 1 billion Likes—and all of that data flowed back into Facebook's servers. Bret Taylor, Facebook's platform lead, announced that users were sharing 25 billion items a month. Google, once the undisputed leader in the push for relevance, seemed worried about the rival a few miles down the road.

Google is a pertinent point of comparison. Google as a search engine is used by people across the planet to identify answers to widely ranging questions, or to locate a particular service or website. As well as Google email being the most widely used public email host on the planet. The goal of Google is to make a wide range of information available to users. In contrast, Facebook's main goal is simply to make more activities 'social', or as I argue, to create a tangible 'social' as an object or graph which then remains the property of Facebook; this data-set can then be sold to whoever wants it. Facebook

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[66]'Disruption' refers to a digital company making redundant the services of an established company. A common example is the taxi application Uber, which facilitates cheaper road transportation in cities globally, and threatens the livelihood of the traditional taxi industry. Another example is the www.airbnb.com website, which connects people offering accommodation in their homes to travellers, at much cheaper rates than guesthouses or hotels can offer, thus threatening the established hospitality industry.

propagates a myth that the more that people connect with one another on its platform the more amicable social interactions will be, and the more effortless (pervasive) capitalism is, the better that society will function. What this effectively does is to commodify communication and social connection. Social relations that previously had an autonomous existence, and grow organically have now become commodities – and this I argue creates a degree of alienation.

This analysis of the different communication aspects that make up the Facebook ecology show not only that Facebook is normalising its use as part of how people engage with the internet (people who avidly use Facebook, and even Instagram as an alternate social network site) through a computer and mobile internet, but also more seemingly discreet forms of communication like the SMS or the WhatsApp message. All these aspects further enrich the data which Facebook can potentially collect on users as well as making the company more and more unavoidable for people living in today's world. The point here being that by monopolising our forms of connection Facebook has immense power and a birds eye view about how people connect this means that it has power to influence how and with whom communication and connection takes place (by making communication and engagement ever more of a passive, or automated, suggested, activity). The point of Facebook managing interpersonal communication on such a wide spectrum, we might soon come to the point where an autonomous private company has a form of media monopoly with which to manufacture consent and ideology on a large parts of the globe.

The Great Social Graph

> [O]n a planet criss-crossed by 'information highways', nothing that happens in any part of the planet can actually, or at least potentially, stay in an *intellectual* 'outside' (Bauman, 2007: 5).

> Calling an algorithmically defined online configuration 'social' has been one of the smartest semantic moves in the history of media institutions (Couldry & Van Dijk, 2015: 3).

Ambitious targets were set a decade ago by the large global, internet-based tech companies. The search engine Google, for example, sought "to create a full-text index of seven million books in the University of Michigan library, along with millions more in the university libraries at Harvard, Stanford and Oxford, as well as the New York Public Library … Google is not alone in trying to digitize library books. Yahoo, Microsoft and other Internet players have joined a collaborative effort called the Open Content Alliance, which is planning to digitize not only library books but other types of multimedia, as

well, making them all accessible on the Web."[67] Google has a second goal, which is "to maximize the personal information it holds on users [to a point where it] is so great that the search engine envisages a day when it can tell people what jobs to take and how they might spend their days off. "[68] The second goal suggests a world that is governed by pervasive information technology, which is able to simulate the real world so successfully that it enables accurate prediction regarding the future of any individual.

> According to Facebook CEO and founder Mark Zuckerberg, one of Facebook's goals is to create a "social graph … [that] mapped out all the connections between people in the world [and] would form this graph, and that's what we're doing at Facebook. Once you've done that, you can start building services on them and enable this broader platform, build games, etc."[69]

Mark Zuckerberg's dream seems to be to create a comprehensive social graph of the world, reflected digitally in information gathered from Facebook use, including all the applications in its ecology. It is to this end that Facebook seeks to monopolise the internet and to dominate even non-internet mediated communication. It wishes to normalise its services and to make them ubiquitous, enabling the gathering of more and more information about its users, enhancing and perfecting its social graph and making the information that Facebook possesses even more valuable. The social graph remains the property of Facebook and its existence will not be known in its entirety to the world at large.

Couldry (2014) refers to the 'myth of big data', which he explains as the belief that global internet companies, such as Facebook, which store vast amounts of personal data, will make possible new forms of social emancipation. Mayer-Schonberger and Cukier (in Couldry, 2014: 93-94, emphasis added by Coudry) speak about "'datafication' that involves quantifying every aspect of everyday phenomena to enable big data analysts to find its hidden order: the result will be 'a great infrastructure project' like Diderot's 18th century encyclopaedia: 'this enormous treasure chest of *datafied* information … once analysed, will shed light on social dynamics at all levels, from the individual to society at large.'"

Zuckerberg's 'social graph' would require an enormous array of social data to achieve an objective of this order. Zuckerberg's ultimate dream seems to be for people to trust Facebook and accept the internet social networking site as truly ubiquitous[70], so that the platform can mediate and reflect all social interactions, and its users willingly and enthusiastically mirror their lives on Facebook. Zuckerberg (2012) believes that:

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[67]http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/17/AR2006051702016.html
[68]https://www.ft.com/content/c3e49548-088e-11dc-b11e-000b5df10621?mhq5j=e1
[69]http://allthingsd.com/20100602/mark-zuckerberg-session/
[70]The rise and ubiquity of smart phones, which serve as a GPS, camera, telephone and microphone, when connected to the internet, mean that Facebook has access to this information which it can then feed into its social graph.

> [t]here is a huge need and a huge opportunity to get everyone in the world connected, to give everyone a voice and to help transform society for the future. The scale of the technology and infrastructure that must be built is unprecedented, and we believe this is the most important problem we can focus on.[71]

Such 'infrastructure' appears to be a utopian vision. However, the proprietary nature of Facebook means that the information will remain the property of the company. The danger is that although the company may aim to "help transform society for the future", the major beneficiaries of the knowledge base will be global corporations which can afford to pay for advertising on Facebook. Such multinational companies exacerbate inequality rather than making emancipation possible. Algorithms which define interactions in a virtual space as 'social' reify this conception of social connection. The social becomes the marketplace, which involves the trading of personal connection or 'friends', and provides a new way to understand marketing and the consumer environment – the 'like' economy. The Facebook social graph plots these complexities, as if it owns the data for the marketplace of the 'social'.

Getting everyone to be users of Facebook is a prerequisite for the proliferation of the social graph. The latest smart phones come with the Facebook application preloaded, which means it is possible at almost any moment to communicate any action on Facebook. Such communication is necessary if the social graph is to mirror human social interactions accurately.

Couldry and Van Dijk (2015: 1) have argued that:

> All forms of power have invested in attempts to construct reality a certain way, and the age of 'social media' is no exception. But *its* constructions work at a different level and with a greater intensity than earlier social representations. They work through processes of counting and aggregation that allow a new and hegemonic *space of social appearances* to be built (original emphasis).

The contentious issue, apart from the concern about Facebook storing each individual's data, is the creation of 'algorithms' which determine what is displayed first, and what is given priority when a Facebook user scrolls through their newsfeed. Such algorithms, which ensure a feed of varied content, ensures that Facebook users remain engaged with the platform. This was made clear in an interview. A respondent related that without this carefully curated content feed, Facebook would have become 'boring'. Hence the drawcard of 'entertainment' is a priority for Facebook to retain its users. Hence many of the posts are not originally posted by 'friends', but are rather a baseline of shared memes,

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[71]https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/markzucker453429.html

news or impersonal stories of interest. Advertising in newsfeed is designed to look like posts, and to fit seamlessly in with short, varyingly impersonal and de-contextualized media content shared by users with their friends.

Facebook has created a seemingly autonomous space where people can mediate and broadcast images that they wish to reflect their lives, albeit expressed sometimes in the form of images, jokes, videos, music, appropriations from popular culture, memes and articles. Mediated culture becomes a shared identity rather than a consumer product that needs to be bought. The performance of self on Facebook means for some users surfing the constant stream of information and its re-appropriation.

Facebook has changed the meaning of communicating on the internet: Facebook is a constant companion, conscious of the world around users, and providing persistent updating about what is happening in the lives of others. Facebook is concerned that it is not seen as an entity that is separate from 'everyday life'. The social is manufactured in order to advertise consumer goods. Hence Facebook can be seen as promoting the hegemony that this is what the 'social' is for, i.e. a neoliberal ideology about fear of 'missing out' on some integral part of the 'social' world.

One of the individuals whom I interviewed had been away from Facebook between 2010 and 2014. She said that during this period she worried that she might be missing out on a friend's news. She thought to herself: "What's the big deal? [Facebook] is pretty harmless and now I can set my own privacy settings in order to keep unwanted people away." Changes in Facebook's privacy settings meant that cyber bullies who had harassed her on Facebook when she was in high school and compelled her to leave the site could now be managed through exclusion.

In recent years, Facebook has made deleting one's profile and leaving Facebook more and more difficult. Today, even if one is not a member of Facebook, if Instagram or WhatsApp are used one will be visible to the Facebook juggernaut. One of my respondents spoke of a high school friend who resisted joining Facebook. However, he had recently joined Instagram, because he felt Instagram was more personal and controllable, and less influenced by advertising and manipulation of newsfeed. He preferred Instagram because it did not seem to require providing so much personal information.

The myth that social media is democratic and egalitarian is still widely believed. However, as I argue throughout this dissertation, the proprietary nature and opacity of Facebook means that its workings mean that the reflection of the users social life becomes something which is individually consumed

rather than collectively produced. As Facebook evolves and its ownership of the means of communication becomes a means of production in a consumer capitalist context, Facebook can choose more skilfully what information is more visible and what information is less visible. This form of subtle censorship belies the myth that it is egalitarian or democratic.

Facebook as Panopticon

In deconstructing the social graph, I try to imagine a world where every action and interaction is in some way mediated or reflected on Facebook. At present it is unclear to what degree the social graph has already been created[72], and how it can be mobilised. As this 'social graph' matures, it remains the property of a private company (Facebook and whoever it decides to share its data with). The rational conclusion of the social graph seems to be that all our actions become visible and reflected online (there are moves now to automate postings so that our activities are posted to our Facebook automatically). The complete social graph evokes a notion similar to Bentham's Panopticon, in which our social lives are completely revealed to Facebook, but we are unaware of the goings on within the powerful Facebook corporate world. Users of Facebook soon forget what they may have posted or fail to recall the exact social image to be maintained to ensure invisibility. Facebook seems to fetishize the past, so that memories of what one has experienced can be repackaged and posted on one's timeline. It is difficult for most individuals to comprehend exactly how much information Facebook has collected about them. Few users can recall all that they may have posted, what they have liked, who they have friended and unfriended, and who has unfriended them, what livestreams they have watched, and what links they have clicked on. Despite the imperative to curate a 'personal brand', Facebook is not necessarily a site where users go to engage meaningfully with their past: it is usually associated with leisure, or entertainment, or an escape from work or a source of gossip. Over a long time period it is likely that Facebook develops a comprehensive understanding of one's social connectedness – which may differ from how one perceives it oneself. This may create an added reason for performance, behaving as if one had a constant invisible observer.

While Facebook defends itself by saying that it "[would] never sell *your* information"[73], it has access to 'bigger picture' intelligence which can ultimately be leveraged for profit. While many Facebook users visit the website daily, few individuals are concerned about Facebook viewing their personal

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[72]There is much secrecy around what Facebook does. Psychologist Michal Kosinski conducted research to establish how Facebook 'likes' could be used to accurately construct a person's psychological profile accurately. After some scarily precise findings Facebook blocked his access to data. When reporter Will Oremus was shown around Facebook headquarters to interview the makers of the Facebook algorithm and asked why the algorithm keeps changing. He was escorted throughout his visit, and was not even permitted to go to the toilet by himself.
[73]https://www.facebook.com/help/152637448140583?helpref=related

information, and when it does, it is in the guise of an 'administrator' who has simultaneous access to everyone's else's personal information. I found that people accept that Facebook has the right to such access for two reasons:

- Firstly, most individuals see themselves as insignificant in relation to the global Facebook membership. Any potentially sensitive information is thought to be lost in the noise of a billion Facebook users. When I asked people who had a concern for 'privacy' how they felt about their information being stored on a Facebook server and Facebook having ready access to it, I received many shrugs and rolled eyes. One person told me he did not worry about it, because, he said, "It is illegal for Facebook to give your information away so that you could be identified from it".

- Secondly the ease of connecting with all one's friends and family members that Facebook provides is enticing, especially when Facebook provides assurances that it will protect unauthorised viewing of your profile and posts by other Facebook users who are not your 'friends'. Privacy fetishism encourages people to see Facebook privacy as a desirable commodity. One interviewee was under the impression that his Facebook page was a desirable, yet unattainable commodity for his peers – suggesting artificial scarcity. He kept a very strict system with different tiers of access and some posts accessible only by some 'friends', and certain information only available to select 'friends'. He appeared to derive a heightened sense of self-importance and superiority from this. I thought his attitude was a symptom of celebrity culture, where the celebrity does not need many fans, but rather derives a sense of exclusivity from his mediated persona. The premium on access to his profile inflated the perceived value of access, at least for the respondent.

It is said that Facebook makes everyone the centre of their own social universe, which is only possible if they are peripheral to the personal universes of their 'friends'. I will examine privacy fetishism again in Chapter 5. However, the example given here shows complete internalisation and naturalisation of sharing on Facebook to the point where the way the individual shares directly affects his own self-worth, and to me this suggests that for him integration of the medium of Facebook is complete.

The opacity of Facebook goes largely unquestioned amongst the respondents whom I interviewed. Many saw Facebook as already naturalised, and any problems that arose were usually blamed on the individual's use of the medium and not on the organisation of Facebook itself. Benign resignation was also expressed. Those who cherished social media in the form of microblogging preferred Instagram

(ironically, owned by Facebook) or Twitter. Those who cherished real-time social media connection preferred Snapchat[74].

Facebook then becomes a meta social network, so enmeshed in consumer capitalist social structures that it does not need to necessarily provide users with meaningful connection, but becomes a reflection of other connections, and curated at that. Moves toward automation are a symptom of this trend. Twitter fans can have their tweets reflected on Facebook, as can Instagrammers and their photos. Facebook is no longer where personal social connection happens, but rather a reflection of life, blending into the background but still ensuring that we are all always visible.

In the Facebook panopticon, the screens of our computers, tablets and smart phones become windows through which the panopticon gaze can be directed at us. Implicit in the technology is that we are always being watched. As Foucault stressed in his writing about modern notions of surveillance the panopticon does this by inducing in the inmate a state of objectivity, a permanent visibility: "The inmate cannot see if the guardian is in the tower or not, so he must behave as if surveillance is constant, unending, and total" (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 2014: 189). The modernist conception of the panopticon which occurred in society as institutions such as the school, prison and hospital among other physical institutions were never able to be total or absolute and created spaces where counter and/or subcultures could exist as an in an antagonistic sense, Facebook on the other hand creates a more total, more pervasive form on surveillance, which means that any form of resistance seemingly cannot occur without the knowledge of the meta-administrator of Facebook itself – at least for those who want to any degree to maintain contact to this reification of 'the social'.

> Social media platforms come to *propose* a certain version of "the social," and how users go on to *enact* it … This social/media dialectic is generating *ethical or normative* concerns … while holding on to the critical potential of "the social" as [a] particular form of social control. (Couldry and Van Dijck, 2015:2)

The panopticon is an apt metaphor for Facebook, although it differs from the original notion of the panopticon in certain ways. One major difference is that 'inmates' (i.e. Facebook users) are not completely isolated from each other and prevented from looking into the cells of other 'inmates'. In fact Facebook as the panopticon directs one to look at certain other Facebook profiles, and not at others. Each user assumes the role of administrator, creating a bizarre constantly changing panopticon, because as soon as you observe the cells of others you become the administrator (and vice versa). Each

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[74]Snapchat is an online social network in which one's posts and messages are only visible for a short time and then disappear, giving them a sense of transience or impermanence. Because of the short lifespan of Snapchat posts, Snapchat does not keep a record of who posts or views what. Thus it does not collect data. Facebook and Instagram have emulated Snapchat with something called the 'stories feature' where the photo or video of a 'friend' or someone whom you follow can be viewed only once before disappearing - another example of Facebook emulating another site's feature.

user observes their unique set of 'inmates' selected by Facebook and based on an opaque algorithm. Another difference is the Facebook ideal envisages the grand 'supervisor', able to view the great social graph in its entirety, as being invisible, a being which would rather not have its existence known or imagined, but rather naturalised. Facebook seems to create a 'myth of us' where *this* (i.e. Facebook) is where we come together and *this* is what constitutes *us* (Couldry & Van Dijk, 2015: 3). In fact in this metaphor the administrator is not Facebook but the collective gaze of the people you know. In my experience this *myth of us* seem to point to a myth of new collectivity, but rather an *us* as opposed to *them,* Insular bubbles of connection. Facebook users are to live out their 'natural' state of existence unaware of the gaze of their administrator (us) unless there is a transgression of the rules – known as 'community standards'.

Facebook users are objects of information to each other, but also subjects of communication. The user becomes the 'administrator' of her own panopticon, looking out on 'everyone', but not as an invisible administrator as others are well aware of her gaze (and vice versa). The gaze of the many administrators is never ending, it is 'impossible for them to leave their post', so appearances must always be maintained.

This distinction of the original panopticon was that it would produce docile subjects. Facebook actively encourages people to be administrator to each other, thus creating the illusion that users wield power in manufacturing their 'social' or what Couldry calls the "myth of us". At minimum it encourages the thought of doing so and the illusion of power in looking at someone else's profile. The power in this panopticon is circulated and reproduced in diverse ways. The administrative power is seen as the collective gaze of all of one's 'social' contacts, but Facebook itself becomes a meta-administrator, out of sight, out of mind, but with a vested interest in a perpetuation of the social conditioning which this interplay of power affords.

Constant visibility becomes our *habitus*, with each person's identity locked in a small box with glass sides through which they are always being watched. However, the individual too is always engaged in watching. The true 'administrator' is not only invisible to our gaze, but often is not even present in our imaginations. This was borne out by some respondents who were overly concerned about which Facebook users (visible administrators) might spy on them, and respondents would tweak their privacy settings accordingly. Many would lie and have their 'relationship status' as 'in a relationship' to ward off unwanted attentions. Some 34% of respondents said that they did not 'friend' people whom they had never met in person, even if that person was a friend-of-a-friend. A higher proportion of respondents (62%) said they chose privacy settings to stop people who were outside certain friend and family groups

from viewing their profiles. Only 47% of respondents were concerned that Facebook might be selling their data. As one interviewee put it, this "went with the territory". Another respondent suggested that Facebook use of his data would "not affect [him] personally", as might be the case with spying by other users. The gaze of fellow administrators creates an almost constant state of objectification of the self or 'identity'. Hence some users are led to adopt a much greater sense of the mediated representation of self.

Through a process of anthropomorphism Facebook markets itself *not* as another administrator or platform, but as a meta-friend, who will help one navigate one's own panopticon, and draw one's attention to the boxes one needs to inspect, such as promptings to re-examine one's Facebook 'friends' through both natural and manufactured events, such as what I call the 'friend-aversary' and reminding one of the birthdays of friends. Facebook really wants users to know that it cares:

Coupled to natural flux in current social relationships (especially in the urban setting of my fieldwork and the transitional life stage of most respondents), groups of friends change, as do romantic connections. One constant for many is that Facebook is a reminder of how the journey of interpersonal connection is to be navigated. The journey of social interaction is a personal one, where the friends one keeps can come and go structurally rather than organically, through the active tasks of

accepting and adding 'friends' or 'unfriending'. Facebook has become the norm for how interpersonal relationships are experienced. According to Bourdieu (1977: 72), this means that Facebook can be seen as *habitus*:

> systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures, predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practises and representations which can be objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor.

Shields (1992: 46-47) discusses selfhood:

> [S]elfhood is expressed in everyday practices and typifications that also allow expression of identity(ies) drawn from elements of the culture as well as the person's earlier identifications. Thus in a differentiated society with a plurality of 'life worlds', there are specific regions for self-presentation where certain salient aspects of an identity may be realized … Every society attempts to encumber everyday life practices with enough satisfactions (or feared deprivations) so that various routines become enduring components of the *habitus*.

Seeing Facebook as *habitus*, I will explore why this idea leads to apathy towards Facebook rather than any form of meaningful resistance. Many respondents seemed to adopt an attitude of calm, almost passive resignation, because Facebook has already been so universally accepted that any opposition to it has little meaning, but can make being a member of an organisation, a student attending a course or even a participant in an online group difficult, because of Facebook's ubiquitous *habitus*. Refusing to be a Facebook member can mean not learning about scheduling of organisational events or workshops. Hence meaningful resistance is not feasible, when Facebook has become an increasingly diverse mode of communication, from WhatsApp messages to simple SMSs. Technology, and more specifically digitally mediation has become an indispensable part of human communication. I argue that in utilising such technologies, owned by profit seeking corporations which offer the communication for 'free', the very sovereignty our communication may be under threat, but there is no real alternative.

According to Baudrillard (2001: 81):

> Each stage of servitude is both more subtle and worse than the one which precedes it. Involuntary servitude, the servitude of the slave, is overt violence. Voluntary servitude is violence consented to: a freedom of will, but not the will to be free. Last comes voluntary self-servitude or enslavement to one's own will: the individual possess the faculty to will, but is no longer free in respect of it. He is the automatic agent of that faculty. He is the serf to no master but himself.

Our social media interactions become the intellectual property of the large corporations that provide the vehicle for these interactions. However, various alternative organisations and groups have attempted to create alternatives to the services provided by the large social media corporate companies. I discovered the alternatives only because of my study. (My respondents notably did not generally have any interest in, or knowledge of these alternatives.) The alternative social media, at the time, include Quitter, GNU Social and Diaspora among others, all of which aim to be completely free and open source. These groups allow social traffic to utilise their respective applications without recording or in any way monitoring messages, nor do they collect personal information about communicators to sell to other organisations. However, since these applications have no financial backing from advertising, nor tracking of servers, their networks do not have the capacity to handle the high volumes of traffic that pass through an organisation such as Facebook. These alternative enterprises cannot afford to hire engineers to add new features to their applications. Ultimately they lack the major advantage which has helped make Facebook so successful – a well-established user base. Another weakness of the alternative social media are that they are at high risk for being hacked or data-mined because they are use open-source software.

Ultimately my research participants were Facebook users because their friends were on Facebook. Its ubiquity and growing ecology draw people deeper into its inescapable web. We are nevertheless free consumers of our socially, mediated, collective reality rather than conscious producers of it. Zynep Tufecki (2014: 207) provides a striking analogy for Facebook filtering procedures which make clear why their filtering algorithm is so problematic:

> …imagine that your service provider has tasked your smartphone - armed with detailed information about you - with keeping you 'engaged' in conversations in order to serve you ads. Your phone would also 'decide' which of your friends and family members were the most successful in keeping you on the line, and which ones caused you to hang up faster. What's more, your phone silenced calls from those it deemed 'less engaging', announced calls with louder and longer rings for those it deemed 'more engaging', and re-arranged speakers' sentences and stories on the fly, as its algorithmic processes served as gatekeeper, with varying degrees of success. None of this is visible to you, or in your control.

The Meaning of Sharing and the Sharing of Meaning

The 'social' is increasingly manifested as an outcome of the panopticon-like feedback between being watched and watching, creating an illusion of collective and free creation of social norms. Meanings of words seem to change in order to fit this new way of mediating our existence. Previously I have

discussed how Facebook reifies the 'social' and creates a 'like-economy'. In this section I will examine how it has re-created the concept of 'sharing'.

Ricoeur (in Appleby, 1996: 380) provides a useful starting point for this discussion: "Substituting signs for things . . . [is] more than a mere effect in social life. It is its very foundation."

In this section I draw a distinction between 'sharing' and 'posting', words which have been reinvented and given new meanings by Facebook. The Swedish researcher Airi Laminen (2015, 1) describes the wide range of outcomes that we utilise social media to achieve:

> We use social media to connect with those we love and with those we have hardly shaken hands with. We humbly brag about our accomplishments, organize social events, and coordinate the co-use of cars and camping gear. We forage for valuable pieces of information and share some of our own specialized knowledge in return. We disclose what is on our mind, or what we are wearing, or how many miles we ran, and what music we listened to on our way. Sometimes we are just goofing around. At other times, our engagement gets intensely serious and political, or we are in it to make some money.

Lampinen's list omits some more prosaic activities: sharing a video or meme, a fragment of mass-mediated culture or a news article, which traverse public social media and especially Facebook today. She argues that given all the activities we engage in on social media such as Facebook, the term 'sharing' may have stretched to the point where it has lost any useful meaning.

What is shared on Facebook includes information, thoughts, emotions, jokes, accounts of events and even social interactions - such sharing of an array of phenomena forms what we could call the 'baseline communism' on Facebook (Greaber, 2011). The individual has access to information based on who her friends are and what they have shared; this information becomes free and open communication that Facebook allows them to share communally. The discussion about sharing which follows is limited to sharing of public snippets of recycled media, and sharing of personal 'posts', as it appears that this common form of sharing has not been as thoroughly investigated as other aspects have.

I contend that all of the items which Airi Laminen lists above as 'sharing' do not involve 'sharing' at all, but rather 'posting'. My understanding of Facebook is that 'sharing' does not involve the expression of original ideas or personal experiences, but rather taking an item which someone else has posted and 'sharing' a digital copy of it. Confusion exists the Facebook meaning differs from the commonly understood dictionary meaning. Using the dictionary definition, one can 'share' what one is doing or thinking with one's Facebook universe by 'posting' about it. Here the act would most likely involve

typing words in a particular available space, and when one has finished composing the message, clicking on the 'post' button. Hence in Facebook parlance this act would be called 'posting' rather than 'sharing'. In my discussion the term 'sharing' describes when Facebook is used as a social network, to distribute social mass media.

A friend may post, for example, a status update as follows: "Finally, a football team I support is finally gonna win something! It's tough when you support Arsenal … I got love for Portugal, so many friends and family but I'm sorry FRANCE all the way!!! Come on lads!!! Time to Gaaaaaadit!!!" What this person is sharing is the fact that he will support France in the Euro 2016 final match. I would call this a personal social media post.

There is obviously a distinction between 'posting' personal thoughts and feelings and 'sharing' content designed for a wider audience. One finds many such memes[75] easily, for example, the Premier League fan page posted the following[76]:
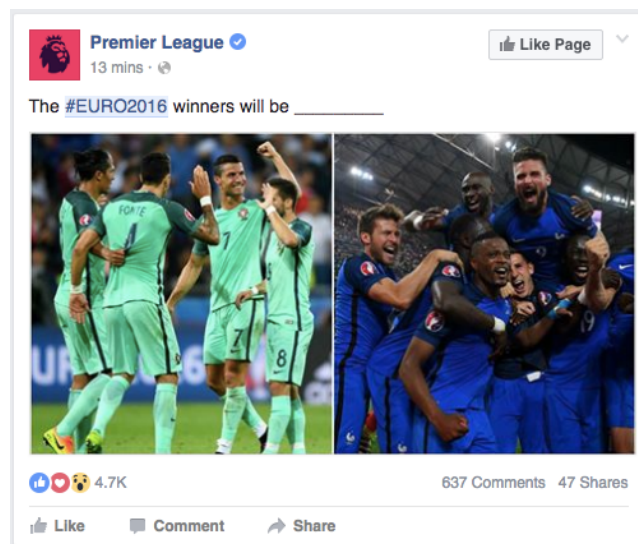
This post had a broader public audience as it elicited over five thousand responses. This is a good example of a public post on social media (which is posted or shared through public pages). Facebook lends itself in this way to individuals sharing a mass meme to express themselves, rather than posting their own thoughts on the particular issue. There appears to be an increase in the virtually reflexive sharing of memes, so that people have difficulty distinguishing between a 'share' by a friend and an

[75]The term 'meme' was coined by the ethologist and evolutionary biologist, Richard Dawkins, to mean a unit of cultural transmission. However, in internet culture it refers to an amusing or interesting video or picture which has been disseminated widely on the internet. Facebook is a platform where memes are common. They are usually not contextually specific or of a personal nature for the individuals who disseminate them.
[76]https://www.facebook.com/premierleague/posts/

advertisement. In my study 43% of respondents said that they would completely 'ignore' advertising on Facebook, while 54% of respondents said that they would 'find suggested posts cool.' (Suggested posts are advertisements that appears in one's news feed, as if they were 'shared' by a friend.) This phenomenon has turned the concept of sharing memes from mass media into a way to engage in advertising. This becomes part of mainstream internet culture, in which we all participate with amusing pop-cultural appropriation or memes and short videos, jokes and images, or news articles. Unlike items that are posted on social media (thoughts, feelings and personal pictures and videos), these posts are rather depersonalised. It is part of the *habitus* of this form of communicating, some expressions of which one might not understand or relate to, but this just means that in response one withholds one's 'like'. Because of their impersonal and often humorous nature, these items can blend rather seamlessly with 'suggested' and 'sponsored' advertising. Advertising then becomes a component of the mediated social communication *habitus* of Facebook, not at the edges, but right where one's friends have their say.

Van Dijck (2013: 3) refers to the potential confusion that can arise between mass media and social media:

> Mass media logic and social media logic get incrementally entangled in defining the popularity of issues and the influence of people. Popularity becomes enmeshed in a feedback loop between man and social media, and becomes part of a larger social arena where different institutional discourses and counter-discourses engage in a struggle to make their logics more pressing. (Van Dijck 2013)

This is the sharing of depersonalised memes or viral content, usually with no specific person in mind, just a generalised share with one's general Facebook public. It is in a sense a public performance. Since one has found the item interesting, amusing or affirming of one's beliefs, through sharing it one communicates an aspect of one's personality, much along the lines of: "Look, this is the type of humour I find funny", or "This is fascinating. Did you know this?" or "I really care about this," communicated publicly or semi-publicly. When one sees a post like this which was 'shared' by a friend, the friend may have no specific intention to 'share' it with one, they just shared it with their Facebook universe, of which one just happened to be a member. Conversely one may well have no desire to view this little snippet of media, but it is 'shared' with one nevertheless.

Consent is not a prerequisite for sharing and neither is the quality, usefulness, truthfulness or agreeability of the item being shared. In Facebook's concept of 'sharing', what is shared cannot be declined, unless one blocks the sharer and never again allows that person to share with you – or you to view any of this person's posts. If what is shared cannot be requested and cannot be refused is it still really sharing at all? There is a certain feeling amongst some of the research participants force feeding

by friends of random impersonal shared content was very irritating, especially when the only available remedy was to block the person's posts.

Impersonal memes are common on Facebook and are a component of the mediated entertainment which Facebook provides. However, Facebook does not create this content, apart from various types of semi-personal messages that Facebook may send one as a meta-friend, often using language that emphasises the fact that Facebook "cares about *you*". Content which is shared in this way, which I would describe as 'impersonal' sharing is still seen as 'user' generated, but only in the loosest possible sense, meaning that most of it was a product of some type of production house or written by a journalist. The sharer has almost complete freedom to share whatever they find as long as it does not violate Facebook's rules, which include the proscription of graphic violence and no images involving the genitals, fully exposed buttocks or female nipples. There is also a clause in Facebook's *Community Guidelines* 2016 which entitles Facebook to "remove certain kinds of sensitive content"[77] or "limit the audience that sees it"[78].

Conclusion

Over the course of this research project I took the reader on a journey, to show how Facebook as a company has sought to colonise and monopolise internet social communication, as well as attempting to 'manage' offline communication such as SMSs. The trend is likely to continue because of Facebook's massive size and its increasing dominance of social media. Facebook's monopoly of social media aims to be global in its reach: able to monitor and record all mediated 'social' interactions, with data gathered from such interactions contributing to an ambitious, continually expanding database. Managing and analysing the data-set, and leveraging of statistical information that is derived from it will become Facebook's unique commercial products. Facebook's monitoring of all mediated social interactions is envisaged as being able to produce what is called the 'social graph' – an unprecedented complex mapping of all human social interaction across the planet. If this graph is to be as comprehensive and as accurate as possible, Facebook needs to become ubiquitous and naturalised in people's lives, which I have argued has to some extent already been achieved. Facebook's current accomplishment is already remarkable enough that Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* can be used to describe the normalised function Facebook serves in the lives of many users. Structural aspects of Facebook have thus become the natural order of things.

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[77]The ambiguity of the term 'sensitive content' means that Facebook reserves the right to censor its users as almost anything can be deemed 'sensitive' to someone.
[78]https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards

Having used Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to understand Facebook, one is then led to ask: Who is visible? To whom are they visible? How are they visible? Facebook users are always visible to one another. It is their awareness of their visibility to an amorphous mass of individuals through both strong and weak ties which constitutes imagined or performed identity. I modified Foucault's metaphor of the panopticon to assist in making sense of the problematic monitoring and surveillance features of Facebook. However, surveillance aspects endemic to the structure of Facebook differ markedly from those described in Bentham and Foucault's original conceptions. Nevertheless, I believe that the metaphor of the panopticon remains a useful reference point in understanding the workings of Facebook and the power of the social.

When one thinks of Facebook in this way (as naturalised, ubiquitous and creating a system of surveillance) then it becomes clear that the earlier vision of the internet as a cyber-utopia has been subverted. One requirement of the *habitus* of Facebook is that one has to conform to one's so-called real world identity (i.e. defined in terms of a passport or identity document), or else one is perceived by Facebook as 'lacking integrity'. As Facebook grows in size and power and naturalises further it will become increasingly difficult not to make use of it or to fall outside the Facebook community.

There were two main lines of enquiry in my research project, one of which was: What is Facebook doing, in creating a 'social graph', to achieve a state of ultimate ubiquity, naturalisation or *habitus*? I could alternatively frame the question in reverse: what is Facebook doing, seeking to become ubiquitous and naturalised, being party to all electronically mediated communication, in order to create as complete a social graph as possible, which can then be exploited? Different framings of the question lead to similar answers: social media are fundamentally intertwined and connected, and have changed the fundamental nature of the internet.

Chapter 5: A Liked Privacy, A Shared Social in a Post-Internet World

Introduction

> What is striking, as one returns to the late 1980s and early 1990s and reads about the internet and its future, is that these accounts were almost uniformly optimistic. With all information available to everyone at the speed of light and impervious to censorship, all existing institutions were going to be changed for the better. There was going to be a worldwide two-way flow, or multi-flow, a democratization of communication unthinkable before then. Corporations could no longer bamboozle consumers and crush upstart competitors; governments could no longer operate in secrecy with a kept-press spouting propaganda; students from the poorest and most remote areas would have access to educational resources once restricted to the elite. In short, people would have unprecedented tools and power. For the first time in human history, there would not only be information equality and uninhibited instant communication access between all people everywhere, but there would also be access to a treasure trove of uncensored knowledge that only years earlier would have been unthinkable, even for the world's most powerful ruler or richest billionaire. Inequality and exploitation were soon to be dealt their mightiest blow (Foster & McChesney, 2011: 1).

This passage describes the vision that much of early writing about the internet espoused, viz. that we would arrive at a social utopia, where the connectivity of the internet would be the great panacea for all of society's ills. It is a sentiment that was reiterated at the dawn of web 2.0 or the social web, which relates to increased peer-to-peer interaction compared to web 1.0, which involved mostly static websites. Web 2.0 involves dynamic websites which are created to support uploading of user-generated content and conversations. Note, however, that when I speak about web 2.0 as 'social', I am not referring to Facebook's specific conception of 'the social', but rather to the interactivity that web 2.0 makes possible. A utopian view of web 2.0 persisted and it resembled aspects of the utopian vision of web 1.0. However, an important difference is that media is now user-generated and shared, and society is a collaborative enterprise. Power is distributed equally in every sphere, and is not retained by the elite. Importantly, media communication involves many in democratic conversation with many, and no longer just one (or a few individuals) in a one-sided monologue with many. Instead, everyone has the right to speak and to be heard.

According to Foster and McChesney (2011: 2-3):

> The early Internet was not only non-commercial, it was also anti-commercial. Prior to the early 1990s, the National Science Foundation Network, the forerunner to the internet, explicitly limited the network to non-commercial uses. If anyone dared to sell something online, that person would likely be "flamed", meaning that other outraged internet users would clog the individual's email inbox with contemptuous messages demanding that the sales pitch be removed. This internal policing by internet users was based on the assumption that commercialism and an honest, democratic public sphere did not mix. Corporate media were the problem, and the internet was the solution. Good internet citizens needed to be on the level; they should not hustle for profit by any means necessary.

The notion that the commercial nature of the internet and a democratic public sphere are incompatible situates the commercial internet as a potential threat to democracy. Belief in the need to ensure freedom of, and access to the internet has not disappeared, with access to the internet being declared a basic human right by the United Nations more recently. Furthermore, social media has been positioned as a democratic public sphere (Castells, 2015; Jarvis, 2011). In this chapter I critique this point of view with regard to Facebook. I argue that the web revolutions can be seen to represent what Gramsci would have called passive revolutions, where the dominant elite, who were supposed to be disenfranchised by the technological revolution, are able to adapt power structures in order to maintain their dominance.

Cammaerts (2015: 7) points to the value of Gramsci's ideas in this regard:

> Gramsci (1971: 59) provided us with another conceptual tool to understand the persisting hegemonic dominance of capitalism and of dominant elites' interests, namely that of the passive revolution – "a revolution without revolution". In the face of fundamental counter-hegemonic challenges, such as financial crises (cf. 1930s), the bourgeoisie and capitalism will mutate and reconfigure with a view of safeguarding and subsequently reasserting capitalist interests … passive revolutions produce genuine change and can be the impetus for far reaching transformations, but crucially whilst at the same time protecting the fundamental interests and the ultimate hegemony of the property and capital owning classes. In other words, hegemony is sustained by taking into account and balancing out – to some extent at least – "the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony will be exercised" (Gramsci, 1971: 161), with a view to reassert "the control that was slipping from its grasp."

Facebook has now created an ecology which enables it to monopolise internet communication to a large extent (see Chapter 4). The first point of departure in this chapter is to examine whether, in what ways and why Facebook may be challenging the concept of a non-commercial internet, while promoting the notion that it subscribes to net utopian ideals of making the internet a forum where internet users are free to connect and to utilise freedom of connection in a social manner. This myth is maintained through promoting a naturalised neoliberal ideology and hegemony. While Facebook positions itself as a forum where people come together, and appears to significantly monopolise mediated communication, resistance to such naturalised hegemony becomes increasingly difficult to sustain, particularly when what appears to be relevant information about the people in one's life is most easily accessible on Facebook – and not being in this place, Facebook, to receive this information is almost perceived as not caring about this information, not caring about friends and family, being in self imposed exile from social life. This was a common concern amongst respondents as the expectation of one being on and keeping up with ones social ties on Facebook was often expressed. There was one

respondent who would accuse his friend of feigning ignorance of something which was posted on Facebook. Others expressed the feeling that to not be cognisant of what was happening on Facebook almost at times amounted to a social disability. Explaining to and helping such disabled people amounted to an arduous chore, or a waste of time. Being a member of Facebook instils in each user a compelling curiosity to find out if anything interesting has been posted by their 'friends'. Users experience a compelling, almost irresistible urge to use the site, and thereby consent to using the internet in such a way that everything they do online is tracked, logged and linked to their identities.

The idea of one's identity actively influencing the way in which one's online experience is presented to one, is perhaps the result of Web 2.0 sites. The same site can appear with different information to different users based on a myriad of factors. The internet as a communal public space is a net-utopian ideal which, I argue in this chapter, that Facebook's 'social' internet undermines. There is no doubt that this form of interaction is about monetising *connectivity,* rather than facilitating *connectedness.* (Van Dijck, 2015: 200) The problem is that these two motivations might well actually be contradictory. Facebook 'suggesting friends' is an example of this forcing connectivity, one respondent noted that indeed this can at times be alienating when one wants to maintain ownership of one's own social network.Saying, "I know who this person is, but I DON'T want to be their friend, why does Facebook always prompt me to add him as a 'friend'?"

According to Meijas (2013: 25-26):

> More than a desire, participation is an urge, a form of coercion imposed by the system. This logic is internalized, rationalized, and naturalized. Participation in the network is a template for being social, for belonging. It is perceived as socially rewarding. It gives the illusion of making us more social … the social is increasingly subordinated to the economy. As reasons to opt out become harder to rationalize (nobody wants to be an outcast; these days, even anti-establishment dissenters have Facebook profiles), the public sphere devolves into a privatized peepshow, where every contribution to the commons cannot escape commodification, and where user-generated content is valued not in terms of its quality, but in terms of its potential to be mined for information that contributes to the maximization of profit.

The investigation into this productive tension involves three points of departure. The first of which is the very idea of commoditising the internet from individual experience. Highlighting the way in which having a persistent idea of identity online (as required by Facebook), effects ones experience of the site and the internet at large. Thus lamenting the death of the *'cyberflâner', w*hich is someone, who is able to more freely and observe without being told what to observe, without being caught looking, and move incognito within the multitude which is the cyber-utopian view of the internet.

The idea of 'the social' is then my second point of departure in this chapter, but unlike in chapter 4, where I looked at the big-data idea of the *'great social graph',* is section I pose the questions of what it means to implicitly commodify interpersonal connections. I argued previously that while proposing to make the world a more social place, Facebook has also reinvented or reified what the meaning of 'social' is. Social engagement is then a form of social construction with its own agenda, one which commodifies social interactions and simultaneously alienates users from the means of production and surplus value generation. The idea of connection, or as it in the case of Facebook, 'friendship', is fetishized. The semantic use of the word 'friend' has interesting connotations of informality, which are directly contradicted when the connections one makes with other Facebook users through 'friending' them are exploited for profit, or one's online identity, situated amongst one's peers or friends takes the form of a consumer profile. I argue that this is in part the expression of a neoliberal hegemony, where everything is open for business if there is an opportunity to profit from it. Rather than Facebook users being free actors, their sense of agency is curtailed by Facebook sending selective newsfeed to users using opaque metrics based on what will best turn them into profitable consumers. The alienation of expression of friendship or connection to others means that the very act of being on the site opens you and your connections to soft forms of economic and even political exploitation. All this takes place under the banner of a naturalised neoliberal ideology, and therefore, one which cannot be challenged, and where everything is fair game for profiteering.

Meijas (2013: 21) contends further:

> The overabundance of communication in a marketplace in which all opinions compete for visibility results in an *everything goes* kind of democracy where change is impossible (after all, if all options are equally valid, how can one course of action be declared superior?). Challenges to the status quo are thus ineffective, as any resistance to capitalism is diluted as merely another option, another alternative in the marketplace of ideas. The only thing that endures is capitalism itself. In this context, networked participation itself can be narrated as an expression of the spirit of capitalism: it is fair (contributes to the common good), it promotes security (contributes to the well-being of the economy and therefore our well-being), and it is exciting (it offers liberation through new opportunities for growth). The more we participate in digital communication networks, the more this ideology is reinforced. To paraphrase Deleuze, communicative capitalism does not stop people from expressing themselves but forces them to express themselves continuously.

Facebook makes out that it is an altruistic meta-friend and a net-utopian champion of democracy. Facebook is presented as a site where one can represent one's self, yet individual users have limited agency in terms of how they engage with the site – not just in terms of restrictions on visual images (as shown in Chapter 2), but also in terms of what they are allowed to see on the site. There is almost a

violence to the process which Facebook enacts. Avoiding this form of sociality, i.e. not being a Facebook user, means being seen as lacking the defining characteristics of a visible or functional social agent, and hence any idea of existing outside Facebook ceases to be possible.

So in the third point of departure, I move now to an examination of how privacy is commodified within this social construction, and examine this as a fetishism of privacy, where one's privacy becomes a product or service which Facebook can provide on its platform. 'Privacy' here refers the Facebook user's exercise of their right to include or exclude another, and decide to whom they will be visible, and decide to whom they will be invisible or only partly visible. This notion of privacy encourages a further naturalisation or even compulsion to accept the site's conception of 'the social', as users seem compelled to look at each other's profiles and ask, 'I wonder what personal treasures this person shares with their friends, or their close friends?' Hence they start to desire to be a member of that person's group of 'friends'. It is difficult to tell to what extent any given person's privacy settings mirror a sense of social reality, but Facebook employs the fetishism of privacy as if it is the case, because even if certain users are not using Facebook as a 'social' space, it needs to cultivate the impression that this must be because they have not been permitted inside this fetishized private space. It also can be seen as a way of neatly justifying the filtering and curation of one's newsfeed – turning, as I have pointed out, one's attention into a commodity able to be sold by Facebook to businesses – which now has the added 'natural' filter of ones 'friends' privacy settings. Facebook users' social anxiety provides the company with yet another opportunity to generate profits.

For those who wholeheartedly adopt the Facebook conception of privacy, Facebook can be seen positioning the privacy settings themselves, and not just the notion of privacy, as a fetish. As a fetish with a metaphysical reality, an individual's privacy settings are seen to reflect the essence of the individual. By creating a configuration of settings, these settings suggest how the individual connects with the world of people. Hence privacy settings are imbued with importance, as if they embodied the person's social 'soul', and Facebook reinforces further its definition of the 'social'.

The *Cyber-flâneur* Goes Mainstream

In an article written for the *New York Times* and entitled 'The death of the *cyberflâneur*,' Evgeny Morozov recounts stumbling on an online article published in 1998:[79]

> …celebrating the rise of the *cyberflâneur*, it painted a bright digital future, brimming with playfulness, intrigue and serendipity, that awaited this mysterious online type. This vision of

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[79]http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/05/opinion/sunday/the-death-of-the-cyberflaneur.html

tomorrow seemed all but inevitable at a time when "what the city and the street were to the *flâneur,* the internet and the superhighway have become to the *cyberflâneur.*[83]

A *flâneur* is a French word to describe a person who explores a city on foot, observing it and experiencing it fully with all his senses, while avoiding attracting public attention. The word was introduced by Baudelaire in 1863. He wrote (Baudelaire, 1965: 9):

> For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world - impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define.

The *flâneur* does not draw attention to himself. Instead he is a 'passionate' observer, able to comprehend what is happening around him without his identity or behaviour being overly influenced by what he observes. Since he can blend into the crowd, he is able to enjoy all the nuances of what he observes. He feels at home in public spaces. The **cyberflâneur** then is someone who is able to move about the internet freely and anonymously, observing strange and wonderful phenomena on the internet without being tracked or personally traced, and leaving no track behind which would create feedback for where the *cyberflâneur*[80] went next. In its 'colonisation of the internet' Facebook has killed off this form of pursuit, since when one is logged on to Facebook all of one's internet activities are tracked and recorded (Gerlitz and Helmond, 2013). Online movement can no longer be free or unobserved. Such tracking of every user occurs in the guise of catering to the user's tastes in terms of newsfeed. Ultimately this happens because it is in the interests of internet companies to be able to direct advertising and news to individuals which aligns with their interests and preferences. It will even be possible in future, once Facebook is able to collect more complex data about its users, for it to predict what users are likely to buy. Morozov's article sees spontaneity and unpredictability in moving around the internet, which was once the norm for online movement, as something which has been lost. For instance, today people seldom speak of 'surfing' the internet, as was common practice previously.

Morozov declares:

> It's easy to see, then, why *cyberflânerie* seemed such an appealing notion in the early days of the Web. The idea of exploring cyberspace as virgin territory, not yet colonized by governments and corporations, was romantic; that romanticism was even reflected in the names of early browsers ("Internet Explorer," "Netscape Navigator").[83]

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[80] A celebrity could never be a *flâneur* anywhere everybody will recognise her and she will become the centre of attention. However, on Facebook there is no celebrity status or infamy, just the pervasive knowledge that one is always at the centre of one's mediated universe, but never really anonymous or invisible.

In the remainder of his article Morozov laments the demise of the ability to engage in "playfulness, intrigue and serendipity", finding such practices to be at odds with contemporary social media. As Bauman (2014, 157) argues, "The art that the *flâneur* masters is that of seeing without being caught looking".

In its effort to make all activity online 'social' Facebook has killed the possibility of searching the internet randomly, as if one was 'just strolling and incognito'. The anonymous internet user was seen as a potential menace: someone who was invisible and could, therefore, hurl abuse at others without being held accountable for his actions. Among my research participants were individuals who had suffered from cyber-bullying while in high school, which led some of them to withdraw from Facebook for an extended period of time. However, I would argue that even given Facebook's insistence that each user have a single 'real' identity, cyber-bullying can still be practised, and can be more personal and hurtful, as well as being an extension of offline bullying.

Cyberbullying along with the advent of Facebook means that the internet is no longer a place where one can escape the troubles of the 'real world'. One cannot easily escape incognito into online communities not linked to Facebook[81]. The counter-argument which can be made is that one can now block the cyberbully from one's Facebook space, and create an online private network.

The spontaneous random exploration of the *cyberflâneur* is further undermined by Facebook's filtering of posts and news to each Facebook user using an algorithm based on the posts which each user previously liked, together with advertisements of items each user was likely to want to buy. This has the added consequence of curtailing the way in which creativity can be expressed online, according to Morozov (2012: [o][82]):

> Everything that makes *cyberflânerie* possible — solitude and individuality, anonymity and opacity, mystery and ambivalence, curiosity and risk-taking — is under assault by that company [Facebook]. And it's not just any company: with 845 million [now just four years later the number is 1.71 billion[83])] active users worldwide, where Facebook goes, arguably, so goes the Internet … The implications are clear: Facebook wants to build an Internet where watching films, listening to music, reading books and even browsing is done not just openly but socially and collaboratively. Through clever partnerships with companies like Spotify and Netflix, Facebook will create powerful (but latent) incentives that would make users eagerly embrace the tyranny of the "social," to the point where pursuing any of those activities on their own would become impossible.

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[81]Escapist online communities are still prevalent in gaming circles. However, my point here is that as Facebook monopolises online space the ability to move around anonymously diminishes, and the whole online experience changes.
[82]http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/05/opinion/sunday/the-death-of-the-cyberflaneur.html
[83]https://www.statista.com/topics/751/facebook/

Individual acts of consumption such as reading articles and books read, listening to music, and watching films and television series online, will in the near future[84] be shared automatically or provided by the Facebook newsfeed, making it easier for Facebook to market its users to advertisers and in turn for advertisers to market back to the users. Facebook sharing seems to have become an automatic function. Even when there is nothing significant which one would like to post about, the sharing of content on Facebook seems necessary in order to remain visible on the site. Yet there has still been a marked decline of 21% in posts of 'original content' on Facebook.[85]

Sharing (auto-posting) seems to limit the users' control over what they share. Users of Facebook receive more impersonal 'professional posts', which can include news, videos, animations and jokes. These are examples of how Facebook has enabled sharing of the weird and outlandish which bounce around the internet as memes,[86] hence serving as a baseline communism of sharing – I identify memes as a communism or communal property on Facebook, because the sharer of the meme does not own, and has generally not produced, the meme, but they tend to move around in a seemingly public, and communal manner – a new form of entertainment. In this way Facebook has made its users into a type of *faux-flâneur* who one goes online to view a range of information and items. In a sense one is 'just browsing' by viewing an automated selection of items that 'friends' or 'friends'-of-'friends' have found interesting online. Facebook has created the idea of being a member of a social group, but taken the agency out of the endeavour. So the *flâneurie* is centralised and determined by the Facebook algorithm, which decides which posts get seen first. Such external, corporate control over what attracts one's attention is in direct opposition to the previous 'net-utopian' ideal of a free and democratic internet. One way in which this process plays out is that the items in one's newsfeed become more and more alike, dictated by the postings of one's friends and what Facebook thinks one would like[87].

Much of what is shared can be described as professional posts, whether news or promotional content. One explanation for this trend is that many respondents have amassed an increasing number of Facebook 'friends' over the past decade, which means that personal anecdotes about one's immediate life situation may be completely inconsequential and irrelevant to most of these 'friends'. Griffith

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[84]I am not making a random prediction here. This does already happen with numerous content sharing apps and news outlets. Control of what we share is being slowly, but deliberately, eroded and automated.

[85]http://fortune.com/2016/04/07/facebook-sharing-decline/

[86]The term 'meme' was coined by ethologist and evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins to mean a unit of cultural transmission, but in internet culture it refers to an amusing or interesting video or picture spread virally through the internet. Facebook is a place where memes are common and they are usually not contextually specific or personal. for the people spreading them.

[87]This has the danger of creating insular online communities, which can encourage continued expression of racism and homophobia on social media among certain users. Users are often encouraged (wrongly) to believe that they are among likeminded individuals. For example, if one has mainly conservative white Afrikaans 'friends', Facebook will seem to be a conservative white Afrikaans space. A similar risk is attendant on any pockets of homogeneity throughout society. Daniel Miller has argued that this is a positive phenomenon, since it precludes Facebook being a force of cultural globalisation. I disagree, since I believe that division and segregation in multi-cultural communities is equally likely.

(2016:[o])[88] suggests that social networking sites such as Myspace and Friendster, Facebook's predecessors and one-time competitors, reached a critical mass where the number of connections between individuals was too large for the content shared to remain relevant. Users of such a site then lost interest, site membership dwindled, and the social networking site effectively died or had to change and cater for a niche market.

Griffiths (2016:[o]) believes this could be a challenge for Facebook too:

> Facebook's decline in personal updates reflects a common growing pain for online communities. What starts out as special and intimate place to share things grows into a big, impersonal, and professional platform. Some online communities try to preserve the special and intimate at the expense of adding new users. (Consider communities like Reddit: thriving, but never quite crossing over into the mainstream.) Others crumble once they do reach the mainstream, causing users to abandon the service for the latest new thing that feels more special and intimate. (There is a litany of examples: Myspace, Bebo, Flickr, Orkut, LiveJournal, Friendster.) … Facebook is remarkable in that it has managed to avoid either path. It went mainstream but didn't lose its appeal, because even if it lost that special and intimate feeling, it has become an essential utility for keeping up with friends and family. Facebook is still the first place where people are *compelled* to share meaningful updates like engagement announcements, baby photos, and vacation photos. A home for your personal press releases.[89]

Facebook users may come to see Facebook as a site where they publish 'press releases' about changes in their lives. In answer to my question, "If Facebook disappeared tomorrow, what would you miss about it?", three of my respondents circled the option for 'Nothing'. All also remarked that there were alternative and better social networks available. They were probably thinking of applications such as Snapchat or Instagram[90], which cater for more 'personal' posts.

Some individuals for instance those who joined Facebook, because "everyone was doing it" 57% of respondents, perhaps a greater number than Facebook would readily admit, have no need for a social network that enables personal 'press releases' or rigidly orchestrated 'personal branding'. Facebook has become a site for sharing of depersonalised and communal memes, videos and pictures made solely to entertain, or for personal 'press releases' such as that one is getting married or has given birth to a child.

Griffith (2012) suggests that the 21% decline in publication of 'original posts' is a worrying trend for Facebook and that the platform might be losing ground. This may be true, since as any regular

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[88]http://fortune.com/2016/04/07/facebook-sharing-decline/
[89]*Ibid.*
[90]As mentioned previously, Instagram is actually owned by Facebook.

Facebook user who has been on the site for some years has seen, Facebook posts on users' timelines 'your memories on Facebook'. Such as the following example:
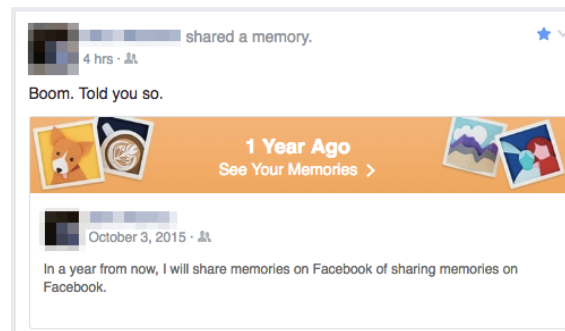
A 'your memories on Facebook' post can be interpreted as a prompt to a user regarding the importance of making an original post, as well as a reminder that Facebook is still 'where your friends are' or 'where you connect with people' and where the users has done so for years. On the next occasion that the user sees an advertisement in their newsfeed that is marked 'news' they are encouraged to think: 'This is what my friends care about', or 'This is something that my friends find interesting, entertaining or inspiring'. 'Suggested posts' can become a form of 'fictitious kinship', where the user is sent a post in the form of an advertisement in the same space where the user's 'friends' and family usually post and share with the user and their Facebook public. In this way brands and companies post, just as the user's 'friends' and family members would in the same online space. Thus the user is overtly persuaded to perceive such consumer brands as being as trustworthy as 'friends' and family, before you have even bought their products.

I would argue that the move away from personal or original posts is no accident. If one's newsfeed is populated with impersonal and entertaining 'professional' videos shared by 'friends', then it is much easier for Facebook to slip advertisements into the newsfeed. If 'friends' express themselves in an impersonal manner, advertisements which resemble the posts of friends can more easily be included in one's newsfeed. This is done through 'suggested posts' (posts of brands Facebook thinks you might like), extending to brands that any of your 'friends' have 'liked'. The latter can be seen as an open invitation for a brand advertisement to appear in your newsfeed, and companies pay Facebook for this attention. Of my respondents 10% thought that 'suggested posts' were a 'completely unwanted and unwarranted invasion', but 53% of respondents reported that such posts were 'cool' or interesting. The latter statistic suggests that Facebook need not be too concerned about the drop in 'original sharing', and that 'suggested posts' are generally accepted by users. This however means that there is nothing organic about Facebook's attention market place. In fact independent creatives, or creators of content, have to pay for reach, no matter how many fans they have liking or following their page.

One example, where one such artist complains that when he posts on his fan page, for the message to be pushed to his fans' newsfeed he is required to pay Facebook, despite the fact that he grew his following organically:

What is of further interest is not just that he needed to pay to reach more than 6% of his "5000+" fans when he posted on his page (in other words reaching about 300), but the fact that if he paid he would reach 100 000 people with his posts, what this suggests for me is that if he paid the posts would become visible for people who did not even like his page. This is an example of the phenomenon where any of your friends can 'like' a page and suddenly that page can be pushed onto timeline of someone who did not actually 'like' it, but one of her friends did. This immediately challenges the myth that social media somehow levels the playing field in terms of marketing independent products, thus belying the idea that the content is 'user-generated' or even about "you". This is then a problematic question when charities and not for profit causes compete alongside massive multinational companies for attention. In the case above, where the performer is legitimately a brand, the idea that Facebook can be a space that provides the opportunity to amass social capital due to one's performance merits, on some level falls flat when one is able to glimpse the mechanism through which these dynamics work.

Through this process Facebook has diluted and commercialised the online cultural artefact, since initially Facebook encouraged sharing of interests in popular culture, including films, music and books. There was often an aspirational goal to be a widely followed "influencer" so once any type of performer passes a certain threshold they could become a paid influencer. In contrast to simply promoting one's own act, the current ethos of social media is to emphasise cultural 'influencers' in the name of consumer brands, rather than 'artists' or self-expression. A user's profile was previously

delineated partly by their cultural interests. This has largely fallen away in the post-modern milieu (Eagleton, 2013). Today a Facebook user's profile is likely to be an advertisement for their personal brand (which is seen as if it were a publicly traded company), their worth measured in social capital (i.e. their number of friends) rather than their cultural capital[91] (their cultural preferences), and their ability to generate a 'profit' (i.e. to generate new 'friends' and extend their influence). Individuals become 'influencers' on social networks such as Facebook. The result can be a fetishization of the 'like', reflected by hash-tags such as #likeforlike or #tagforlikes, which explicitly encourage the viewer to 'like' the item, only in order to generate more 'likes', so that the person who posted is then perceived as having greater value in the 'like-economy' (Van Dijk, 2013: 200):

> Initially, platforms like Facebook were commonly regarded as a space for (personal) *self-expression* and for making connections between friends. Gradually, users have come to understand the art of online self-presentation and the importance of SNSs as tools for (professional) *self-promotion*. Since each form of self-communication brings along a specific concept of audience, users had to learn how to handle privacy settings and presentation styles accordingly.

The Social as Consumer Object

Couldry and Van Dijk (2015: 3) point out:

> If in the 19th and 20th centuries economic forces infiltrated the specific domains of leisure, sports, and public communication, in the first decade of the 21st century, it is the whole domain of informal connections and interpersonal exchange that has been absorbed by commercial platforms.

The space in which Facebook creates the 'social appearance' of 'friendship' can be both a representation and a fact. For example, the fact that two people are friends in the real world can be represented by their being 'friends' on Facebook, in which case their Facebook friendship is a representation of a real world truth. The representation of being 'friends' on Facebook can also be a fact only on Facebook, with no corresponding reality of connection outside of Facebook. An example is when a 'friend' request is sent to a stranger on Facebook and the request is accepted. Some 63% of my respondents admitted to having 'friends' on Facebook whom they had never met. For most this was a symptom of their indifference to the social network platform. However, such connections are valuable to Facebook, since they create further nodes, with the total number of nodes reflecting added value for the advertising that is shown. The value that Facebook allocates to a user's connections is in this sense independent of the value assigned to them by the Facebook user – it is impossible for Facebook to completely mirror real-life offline connections.

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[91]I argue that an understanding of 'cultural capital' on Facebook is yet another way to segment and divide users via the Facebook algorithm, since one often sees posts from 'friends' who 'liked' similar things, but one does not see posts from those who do not express 'liking'.

Hence Facebook fetishizes connection: 'If you want to see what [name of person] shares with her friends, send her a friend request' is the message given when one views the profile of someone with whom one is not yet a 'friend'. There seems to be explicit encouragement to always 'connect more' on Facebook. How many friends do you have? Do they like and comment on your posts, and how often? (And how many comment?) What are your barriers to friendship: do you wait for other users to add you as a friend to see what you post? In analysing and observing one's friends on Facebook there is explicit interaction with the platform. The questions to be answered are: Are you using Facebook appropriately? Do you best capitalise on your social situation?

Whoever buys access to a proportion of Facebook users validates Facebook's view of the 'social'. This is nevertheless an outcome of the *habitus* of connection that Facebook has created. The fact that more than 1.7 billion people worldwide are members of this social media platform is a reification of the idea that Facebook is the 'social'. Facebook has become a self-sustaining attention economy in its own right, with no known precedent in human history.

Thus there can be little resistance to Facebook's hegemony from without. If the commodification of interpersonal relationships becomes its capitalist identity it becomes a space where counter-hegemony is impossible, because Facebook is 'free'. For everyone who makes use of this free service it becomes socially constitutive, and feeds back into the suggestion that Facebook is a reflection of social reality. According to Couldry and van Dijck (2015: 3):

> Facebook's "friending" or "liking" buttons have little basis in the social reality of consolidating friendships or preferring cultural content (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013); they are computational systems that assign data their value as economic currency in a global online sociality.

Through the encouragement to see one's friendships as metrics, one may be led to perceive their value only in this way, thus fetishizing friendship and social connection. In my experience most respondents do not see Facebook as being of much value in and of itself: this is precisely where the habitus and neoliberal hegemony lie.

Dismissal of these metrics of human relationships is not easy to achieve. The platform's own interface can be used as an example: it is very easy to create a Facebook account, but it is very difficult to subsequently delete one's account. Even if one decides one has had enough of Facebook and wants to delete one's account, my fieldwork shows that although users have tried, the account seemingly never

disappears. It merely remains dormant until one comes back to resume activity. This is constitutive of the social graph, ideally even if you do not want to use it, it wants to know that you exist. In terms of social construction it is easy to enter into this kind of connection but extremely difficult to escape commodifying the webs of social connection that we all weave, and which Facebook is able to generate an alienated form of 'surplus' value from.

What is interesting about Facebook is that it is still viewed as an externality. For example, if someone phones you and is threatening or abusive, you are unlikely to blame the caller's service provider. This is something which people fail to understand about a study of Facebook: it is not the users alone who determine its nature. If for example, I add someone as a 'friend' whom I have never met in real life, the act of 'friending' does not create the type of connection that the word 'friend' usually connotes and however this may vary from person to person. Hence, attaching the word 'social' to itself does not mean that Facebook necessarily has society's best interests at heart. Through taking one's friendships and connections and turning them into a source of profit, Facebook has become the quintessential neoliberal company, where (Hall & O'Shea, 2013: 4):

> we can be persuaded to see ourselves simply as 'customers', then all the other relationships are reduced to one common denominator: the fact that we are consuming a product [sic] in a market [sic] which only has value because we pay for it [sic]. Everything becomes a commodity, and this aspect of our activities over-rides everything. In this way a whole new way of seeing society (as a market) is coming into play. If developed, it could provide the cornerstone for a new kind of (neoliberal) common sense.

Taking a neoliberal standpoint, if we are consumers of our own mediated sociality, and we do not pay for this then we are indebted to Facebook – a debt that Facebook is free to collect in any way it wishes to do. Regulation and transparency will not impede Facebook from collecting on that debt, and the 'social' – information about our intimate social relationships and networks – becomes fair game. Since not being a user of the site is not a viable option, where could users go anyway to voice any concerns they might have.

McChesney (2011: 2) puts forward the following argument:

> … in any capitalist society there is going to be strong, even at times overwhelming, pressure to open up areas that can be profitably exploited by capital, regardless of the social costs, or "negative externalities," as economists put it. After all, capitalists—by definition, given their economic power—exercise inordinate political power. But it is not a given that all areas will be subjected to the market. Indeed, many areas in nature and human existence cannot be so subjected without destroying the fabric of life itself—and large portions of capitalist societies have historically been and remain largely outside of the capital accumulation process. One could think of community, family, religion, education, romance, elections, research, and national defence as partial examples, although capital is pressing to colonize those where it can. Many important political debates in a capitalist society are concerned

with determining the areas where the pursuit of profit will be allowed to rule, and where it will not. At their most rational, and most humane, capitalist societies tend to preserve large non-commercial sectors, including areas such as health care and old-age pensions, that might be highly profitable if turned over to commercial interests. At the very least, the more democratic a capitalist society is, the more likely it is for there to be credible public debates on these matters.
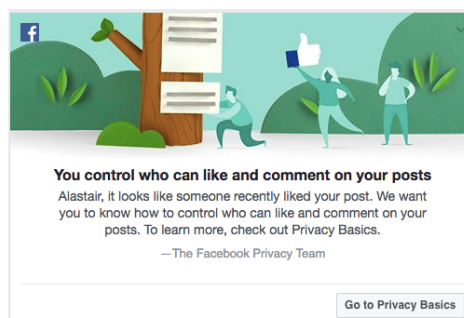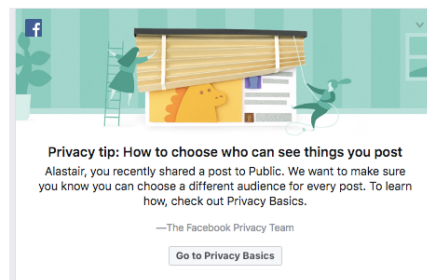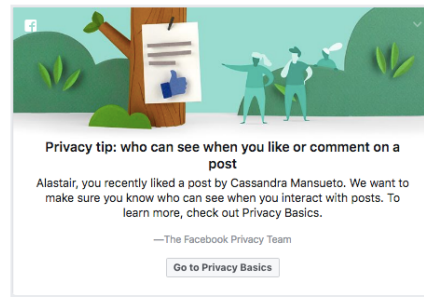
Privacy Fetishized

When we try to preserve the sphere of privacy against the onslaught of instrumental objectivized [sic] 'alienated' public exchange, it is privacy itself which becomes a totally objectivized [sic] 'commodified' sphere. Withdrawal into privacy today means adopting formulas of private *authenticity* propagated by the recent culture industry - from taking lessons in spiritual enlightenment, and following the latest cultural and other fashions, to engaging in jogging and body-building. The ultimate truth of withdrawal into privacy is a public confession of intimate secrets on a TV show - against this kind of privacy, we should emphasize that, today, the only way of breaking out of the constraints of 'alienated' commodification is to invent a new collectivity (Žižek, 2002: 85).

Facebook has created elaborate privacy settings to persuade its users that their information is secure, and to encourage disclosure of sensitive information. During focus group discussions, some participants were cagey about disclosing who they would accept as 'friends' and had stringent privacy settings. These individuals were reluctant to answer seemingly innocuous questions about Facebook use, including questions such as: 'Are you still friends with people from your high school, or do your recycle your friend pool when moving into a new phase of life?', or 'Have you ever become romantically involved with someone whom you first became aware of because of Facebook?' They seemed to fear I would be judgemental if they answered these questions incorrectly, yet bizarrely, they felt comfortable disclosing similar forms of personal information to Facebook. A general trend emerged among research participants: they were more concerned about their social privacy than about their institutional privacy. Morozov (2011: 156) comments acerbically: "In the past, the KGB resorted to torture to learn of connections between activists; today, they simply need to get on Facebook."

Žižek (2002) points out that the retreat into privacy may be understood as an attempt to protect one's intimate identity from consumer culture, but it in fact hampers the creation any new collectivity, the fetishization of privacy merely reinforces a self-sufficient hegemony of consumerism.

In a neoliberal society government or institutional demands for personal information might be seen as an undesirable overreach. Institutional actors are perceived to be most likely to curtail one's freedom through excessive regulation, but if regulation is a component of consumerist culture then the individual needs to be seen as a conspicuous consumer, even of social relationships, and visible to the 'right people' and to the meta-friend of Facebook. The *habitus* of Facebook means that it is necessary to provide the platform with extensive personal information. In addition, every action taken on the Facebook site provides Facebook with additional information. Facebook tries to convince users that they control their own levels of privacy, so they will feel comfortable about disclosing further

information to Facebook. Such fetishization of privacy creates the imperative that one and one's friends highly value the Facebook connection. It has always been possible to send private messages on Facebook, and privacy settings to determine who can view one's profile have been in place for some time. However, at a point Facebook started posting reminders about how to make one's communications more private, with the following message popping up on the newsfeed:

Privacy tip: who can see when you like or comment on a post
Alastair, you recently liked a post by Cassandra Mansueto. We want to make sure you know who can see when you interact with posts. To learn more, check out Privacy Basics.
—The Facebook Privacy Team
Go to Privacy Basics

Privacy tip: How to choose who can see things you post
Alastair, you recently shared a post to Public. We want to make sure you know you can choose a different audience for every post. To learn how, check out Privacy Basics.
—The Facebook Privacy Team
Go to Privacy Basics

You control who can like and comment on your posts
Alastair, it looks like someone recently liked your post. We want you to know how to control who can like and comment on your posts. To learn more, check out Privacy Basics.
—The Facebook Privacy Team
Go to Privacy Basics

The extent to which one can ensure that certain information is 'private' and selectively 'share' other information seems to be why respondents who are more concerned about privacy nevertheless entrust Facebook with personal information. The appearance of another Facebook user on Facebook is to accept on it that it is the 'social', and may also have come to believe that the 'social graph' is important. However, 23% of respondents saw no problem in their Facebook activities being completely public, with an increasing proportion of their social lives and actions becoming visible to Facebook.

It may be in Facebook's best interests that users adopt more stringent privacy settings, since such information provides rich data for the 'social graph'. Knowing which of one's friends one does not want to share information with is potentially more valuable information for Facebook than knowing with which friends one is willing to share.

In recent years Facebook has made its privacy settings more complex, and has given users greater control over access by various groups to see, like, comment on or share one's posts and shares. Facebook's fetishization of privacy has normalised segmentation of one's contacts, and encouraged users to be selective regarding personal and private posts, which can also be seen as commodifying social anxiety. Suspicion is raised that some of the posts of the user's 'friends' and family members are concealed from the user, and hence that individuals are engaging socially without the user having knowledge of it. Such suspicions may or may not be unfounded. However, regular reminders about privacy settings suggest to users that Facebook is where the 'social' happens, and that the user may be excluded from it.

In my fieldwork I found that having tiers of for the levels of privacy enjoyed by different 'friends' was not the norm. A great deal of indifference was expressed toward the Facebook platform and regarding privacy settings.

According to Van Dijck and Poell (2013: 8), "These networks do not require strong organizational control or a collective identity; instead, social technologies function as organizing agents." Collective identity is challenged by vast loose networks of friends and the collective identities once endemic in popular or youth culture may have been made obsolete or at least become less performative because of social media such as Facebook. In this light privacy settings can be a prompt to create such identities in an inclusive, partly visible space, or give the impression that Facebook is still where such collective identities reside, even if not visible, in this way reifying Facebook as the 'social', at least for all its users.

Any uni-directional perspective on privacy is incomplete as every Facebook user – even the most private person – desires being visible to someone else. A construction of hegemony is based on social connections. The idea that 'some are more deserving than others' is the worldview which users buy into, because if one can't show that one is valuable social capital then others won't see one as a sound social investment. Automated posting then becomes a technical means to send certain posts to a select few 'friends' through intricate privacy settings, while more general posts are visible to all. In this way Facebook users maintain weak ties with a large pool of their 'social capital' (i.e. 'friends' on Facebook)

without alienating them through exposure to personal and private posts. I argue that such phenomena provide ever richer data for Facebook and generate a more accurate 'social graph'. So in segmenting one's Facebook connections one provides work and data for Facebook, and suggests the value attached to various social capital assets. Meijas (2013: 26) suggests:

> Labor is no longer conducted at the workplace in exchange for a wage. Rather, it is produced mostly outside the workplace, during our "free" time. It is rewarded not with a pay-check but with social capital such as attention, rank, and visibility. Surrendering privacy and property, lured by promises of fleeting viral fame and motivated by fear that we will be the only ones left out, the urge to participate impels us to upload the fruits of our creative labor and hand over the social capital of our electronic address book.

The thought that we would put a premium on information creates the myth that if it is valuable *to someone* ultimately it is valuable *to Facebook*. By redefining the terms 'privacy' and 'social', Facebook thus naturalises itself as the gatekeeper for such information. Information which one has been encouraged to keep 'private' must not be seen as valuable to Facebook, because Facebook is a fundamental part of the *natural social* order which it has constructed, in a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Within this *natural* order (Fuchs, 2011: 6):

> … privacy is strictly conceived as an individual phenomenon that can be protected if users behave in the correct way and do not disclose too much information. All issues relating to the political economy of Facebook, such as advertising, capital accumulation, the appropriation of user data for economic ends, and user exploitation, are ignored. One can therefore characterize such analyses as Facebook privacy fetishism.

Facebook's expansion of privacy settings can be described as entrenchment of 'privacy fetishism' (or in Marxist terms, alienation from the means of profit derived from one's own labour). The irony here is that information shared with Facebook, and which Facebook does not reveal to other Facebook users, ceases to be private property, but neither is it communal property. It is communal for the user if it is visible to them, so everyone then has a different sense of what is 'communal'. This makes the "new kind of collectivity" (Žižek, 2002: 85) that might challenge consumerist hegemony, ever more unattainable. Information is made available to advertisers and marketers so that Facebook is able to derive a profit from it. Paradoxically, as much as Facebook professes to ensure that one's information is confidential, it omits to say that such information ceases to be one's sole property and Facebook's sale of such information enables a service to be provided, in the form of better targeted advertisements and products which one is likely to buy. This ever more detailed information provided to Facebook through the labour of defining privacy settings, is tangible information. Users provide the labour to

produce it, but it is used as, and always in a sense is, the property of Facebook. In the name of greater privacy people are encouraged to put more information on the social graph.

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'Privacy settings' on Facebook can also be seen as a fetish for the user, since their privacy settings become objects imbued with the user's indelible spirit or at least their 'social' identity. This happens as follows: the user's general collection of Facebook friends is usually an amorphous collection of everyone whom they have ever met, and who have not provided the user with a reason for 'unfriending'. Losing such loose connections is detrimental to the personal brand, especially given the quantified value of social connections, which Facebook's structure provides. The user then has the broadest possible audience when they need to make a 'press release' post. Complex privacy settings which group 'friends' into categories mean that every interaction and post on Facebook contributes to a more nuanced picture of who is closest, who is more peripheral, who is an acquaintance, and who is just a random person who sent a friend request and wasn't declined. Privacy settings become a fetish that mirrors or represents the social 'user'. This is then actualised as the 'social graph' – see Chapter 4 for more details.

Conclusion

In this chapter I alluded the argument that in a direct challenge to the hegemony of neoliberalism, there are spaces which should exist outside the ethos of capital accumulation. This proposal is made based on the sense of indifference which many of my respondents expressed towards Facebook, while experiencing definite social pressure to belong to it. Once on Facebook, users begin to manage their social connections, even if they did not buy into the Facebook conception of the 'social', since while Facebook fetishizes 'the social' there is always a grain of truth in what the platform represents.

I begin with the premise that the internet itself could not have developed in the way it did if it had begun as a tool subject to capitalist accumulation (Foster & McChesney, 2011: 2):

> The entire realm of digital communication was developed through government-subsidized-and-directed research and during the postwar decades, primarily through the [US] military and leading research universities. Had the matter been left to the private sector, to the "free

market", the internet never would have come into existence. The total amount of the federal subsidy of the internet is impossible to determine with precision.

Certain aspects of the capitalist accumulation process which Facebook uses are directly opposed to the ideal of a free internet. I invoke the notion of the *cyberflâneur*, who is free to move around the internet without being tracked or monitored. The ideal of free and open internet communication is under siege by Facebook – the *habitus* established by Facebook makes this increasingly explicit (see Chapter 4). Not being a member of Facebook presents its own difficulties. The free and open cultural communication which the internet once seemed to promise is being undermined by Facebook's push for popularity and its insistence on making newsfeed content relevant to users. Both of these phenomena add up to censorship and cultural determinism in the name of generating profit. I argue that by controlling what users watch and consume through its 'attention economy', Facebook has flattened broader engagement. Content can be suggested, filtered and thrust onto users, curtailing personal agency in media consumption and threatening independent thinking for those 63% of my respondents who used Facebook to obtain information about the world at large and not just social connections.

I then address the question of how interpersonal connections are exploited for profit by Facebook. I am not arguing that people never previously used social connections for personal enrichment or gain. Social connectedness has always been a source of income generation. However, Facebook's conception of it is an alienated means of wealth production. Knowing who people know and how they know them gives Facebook enormous influence and power; the way in which it leverages users' connections for profit is largely opaque.

Furthermore, Facebook determines which of one's connections are more relevant and which are not. It takes the liberty of filtering what one's friends post, the algorithm for such filtering being unclear and subject to constant change. A reification of social competition takes place through metrics of 'social worth' based on how many 'friends' one has and how many 'likes' or comments one's posts receive. This process thereby quantifies interpersonal engagement. While the outcome may be a metric of value to Facebook in terms of calculating the worth or influence of users, I argue that many users then see such metrics as a reflection of their self-worth. If social engagement is quantified in this way it numbs users' interpersonal engagement on the site, because the more 'interactions' that a user is able to generate, the greater the value they represent to Facebook. Such surplus value generation is an alienated process for users, yet they are recompensed for their engagement and social connections with the capacity to engage further and thus acquire increased surplus value. Facebook's non-organic curated

news feed manipulates only to increase engagements, and to package users' attention to third parties who are able to pay for such attention.

This section speaks to the idea of the social graph in chapter 4, but goes further to question the income generated by interpersonal connections. I suggested that there is a strange fetishization or alienation of interpersonal connection at play here. That in the Facebook environment the creation of the *'social graph'* amounts to a pervasive hegemony of consumerism, where attention is farmed and sold. This happening in an alienated sense, because most people just go onto Facebook to keep up with 'friends'.

Finally, I examined the recent shift by Facebook to offer more, or at least promote its privacy options, and suggest some of the reasons for this move and their consequences. I argue that Facebook has fetishized privacy, so that privacy has become a commodity, which can be positioned as having artificial scarcity, suggesting that Facebook is more 'social' than any user is able to discern and with more than a billion users of course it is. I look at how privacy settings immediately give Facebook more detailed information about a user's social connectedness, and makes the users' own social connectedness into a fetish, which reinforces the notion that Facebook is indeed where the 'social' takes place.

Going deeper into the fetish of privacy settings, I suggest that, the privacy settings themselves, if the *habitus* of Facebook is accepted, become a metaphysical object in their own right. What I mean by this is if one uses the complex barriers to create various degrees of visibility and invisibility on the site, then the settings themselves become a fetishized object that reflects ones social connectedness and interaction. Almost a constant, but malleable object which contains the essence or spirit of ones' social connectedness.

Chapter 6: Final Reflections

Throughout this dissertation, in the attempt to discern some of the productive tensions in Facebook's structures of connection, I may have sounded almost exclusively critical of the manner in which Facebook connections are managed and maintained by the platform itself. I have invoked the idea of Facebook as a surveillance structure, analogous to modern panoptic institutional systems of surveillance in which one's permanent visibility serves as a means of social control. I spoke of such practices as being a vehicle for pursuing consumerist and neoliberal hegemony, and suggested that users' most intimate social information is exploited for profit using opaque methods which have an alienating effect on individuals. Such views may seem to imply that I am a Luddite, arguing that the all online platforms of social connection are detrimental to society. However, this was not my intention – in fact it is precisely because I have such faith in net-utopian ideals of the internet that I am so critical of what it has become. My goal with this research is to use critical theory to be on this specific form of online platform which uses black-box filtering and sets out to monopolise social media – a communications technology which seeks to actively shape how communication occurs, for its own profit.

For a long time I saw the ideal of social online connection in a very positive light, which is certainly what initially drew me to this kind of research. However, what disturbed me was one particularly powerful media company's increasing monopoly of such communication, through which it now seeks to track and monitor all online social connection, and thereby reconstruct 'the social' in its own image. The company justifies the commodification of connection by providing a means of connection which has arguably naturalised its preferred structures for online connection on an almost global scale. It has fetishized the concept of friendship and the act of liking (or appreciating) something. It attempts to go much further, and fetishize 'the social', in so doing making possible the fetishizing of 'privacy' on its own platform and increasingly, throughout the internet.

Such a mode of connection, I argue, is a vehicle for neoliberal hegemony and a means to establish a *habitus* of connection. The platform ensures that challenging it and creating an alternative social collective is increasingly impossible to undertake or achieve. Meanwhile it perpetuates the notion that none of this is happening, and that its intentions are entirely for social good. What is perhaps the essential issue here is to question what the agency of such a company means in practice. It has a radically different form of agency to other modes of communication – such as a telephone, a written letter or even an email – these are all culturally encoded mediums and thus have their own clear intentionalities. Facebook is something entirely different, in that it actively and deliberately shapes and confines communication in a manner which fetishizes the connection it makes possible, as well as the

forms of connection which existed previously. It thereby is able to create its own 'grammar' of connection, regardless of what traditional modes of connection might have involved.

I referred earlier to Tufekci (2015: 207), who clarifies how a communication medium which actually tampers with communication is able to advance its own version of 'the social':

> It is hard to find an exact offline analogy to the computational agency behind Facebook's filtering of social interactions. One example might be to imagine that your service provider has tasked your smartphone-armed with detailed information about you-with keeping you 'engaged' in conversations in order to serve you ads. Your phone would also 'decide' which of your friends and family members were the most successful in keep [sic] you on the line, and which ones caused you to hang up faster. What's more, your phone silenced calls from those it deemed less 'engaging', announced calls with longer rings louder for those it deemed more 'engaging', and rearranged speakers' sentences and stories on the fly, as its algorithmic processes served as gatekeeper, with varying degrees of success. None of this is visible to you, or in your control. In this analogy, your phone would algorithmically manipulate who you heard from, which sentences you heard, and in what order you heard them-keeping you on the phone longer, and thus successfully serving you more ads. Now imagine that the phone company had published an article pointing out that letting more phone calls from your cheerier friends and family members made you cheerier, and those from more gloomy ones resulted in gloomier conversations. You would expect a strong public reaction. Computational agency raises such issues.

Perhaps this possibility was inevitable once internet communication matured. Facebook was initially just one of many companies competing to fill a gap in the market. Facebook succeeded beyond all expectations because, as Eli Pariser suggests, it was closer to a 'utility' than to a 'nightclub'. I have argued throughout this dissertation that what it has now become is far from a utility. Indeed, it appears to be in the process of disrupting cultural industries by becoming a site for memes and for 'professional posts', and perhaps evolving into the most powerful distributor of media content ever, certainly in those parts of the globe where it has achieved a virtual monopoly of social networking. It has morphed into a media company in its own right, one which has been able to avoid regulation by repeatedly declaring to the public that it is 'just a technology company', and that all its content is 'user generated'.

Napoli and Caplan (2017: 1) point out that:

> many digital media companies use terms like 'platform' strategically, to position themselves both to pursue current and future profits, to strike a regulatory sweet spot between legislative protections that benefit them and obligations that do not, and to lay out a cultural imaginary within which their service makes sense.

Yet I would suggest that what Facebook is engaged in doing goes a great deal further than simply being a media company. Facebook is far from just embodying a particular type of technology or a new mode of communication. I would argue that it is something else entirely, something unprecedented.

The argument for innovation of new technology is compelling, in the sense that once a viable new technology is introduced it has the potential to change the way social life takes place. The difference with regard to Facebook is that the company utilises a unique form of agency in actively curating and filtering what is communicated, as well as enabling third parties to purchase social attention. Perhaps then Facebook is a media company, although it is likely to argue that all its content is really 'user generated'. The examples provided earlier of the *French Flag* and *Celebrate Pride* profile picture filters (chapter 2) belie this notion. Yet for a company which claims not to be a media company, it appears to disseminate much more 'news', advertising and entertainment content than any self-identifying media corporation ever has.

At the time of writing (2017) there is a great deal of media 'hype' about so-called 'fake news' and its political implications. During my fieldwork I became alarmed about the ease with which companies could fabricate media items which resembled legitimate news stories, but which were purely a means to sell a commercial product. What appears to have happened is that politicians, or in fact anyone with a vested interest in influencing people's opinions without their knowledge, can use Facebook's sophisticated demographic targeting mechanisms to disseminate propaganda to specifically targeted groups of people. Such messages can then be shared by such individuals 'publicly', but can also be spread as if they were advertisements, via a platform where users champion informal connections with 'friends' in a partly public or a private manner. There is an argument to be made that such phenomena are themselves an example of a neoliberal capitalist and consumerist hegemony. Instead of the web 2.0 utopian ideal of a shared, open and user generated social network, one has to pay to reach a specific audience. The practice may be called neoliberal because it regards government structures and the political domain as just more consumer markets. With prevalence of 'privacy fetishism' increasing, it is almost as if users are being encouraged to rather confine their thoughts and communications within increasingly private networks. If you want to reach a wider audience you have to pay a site such as Facebook for the privilege of doing so. I am not talking here about decontextualized memes, but about broader social engagement, which is then subject to Facebook's business model rather than free and unrestricted peer-to-peer sharing. The implications for this in terms of activism and protest threaten to be dire as they can render it invisible to those unable to pay for reach of their message.

Facebook's insists that it is 'only' a tech company, a platform or a utility, and that whatever messages are communicated on the platform depend entirely on what its users post. The counter-argument is that by algorithmically curating and filtering users' *newsfeeds*, Facebook has primary agency in determining what users will see. Napoli and Caplan (2017: 3) refer to differences between social media and traditional media in terms of who determines the content:

> Representatives of these platforms would likely argue that the nature of their interaction with users is fundamentally different from traditional media, in that social media users play a much more autonomous role in determining the content that they receive. That is, the users, in collaboration with their social networks, ultimately dictate the content that they consume, with the platform serving as neutral facilitator. Whether a reflection of naïveté or disingenuousness, this position is simply no longer tenable.

I argue that what Facebook's algorithms achieve is that they create a context in which capital can buy human attention. While the derivation of the algorithm may have exploited personal networks and connections, in order to promote the business of marketing consumer products, in terms of political engagement or democracy, it can be seen as overtly manipulative, and perhaps can disseminate bias more extreme than any found in traditional news media. In a pluralistic world where all narratives compete equally for attention, there is no accountability in terms of truthfulness or right information. These errors are compounded by the common-sense idea that people trust those whom they have accepted into their lives, and thus by extension they should trust what they see on Facebook as a true reflection of the world around them. A few of my respondents did not see Facebook as an entity with any form of agency, and not necessarily because they trusted Facebook explicitly, but simply due to its 'utility' status. Yet by no means everyone bought the view that Facebook was a genuine source of truth. As mentioned previously, many respondents expressed profound indifference towards the site.

On a superficial level this may be owing to the fact that Facebook is not perceived to be an exciting informal social space, where young people could meet, but rather a decontextualized throng of all the people one has ever met, including authority figures such as teachers and managers; family members such as parents, siblings, aunts and uncles, and cousins. This may seem like hard work, especially for those who could not be bothered with complex tweaking of their privacy settings to manage an informal social space. Yet appearances must be maintained. I highlight this issue as a likely cause for some of the indifference expressed towards the site by respondents. Yet even if they found the site 'boring' or 'lame' this did not mean that they will not believe something which masquerades as the truth of the site, as the site became for many a representation of the 'public' world at large, albeit with a personalised set of nodes(friends) which would filter this public representation. When respondents went about their daily lives they tended to disproportionally miss the distinction between their Facebook public, and the public at large, seemingly opting for a cool self-sufficiency rather than

identifying as part of a broader society. In my study 10% of respondents joined the site in order to receive general news about the world, and 19% of respondents feel that happening to receive news about the world around them (and not just about 'friends') was what they valued most about Facebook. While it is often a major issue in the mainstream media in the United States, Britain and Europe, South Africa is certainly not immune to such 'fake news' being circulated:

In all the cases shown above the posts were fairly rapidly identified as 'fake news'. However, some users accept such misinformation without a second thought regarding the veracity of the source. Moreover, 48% of my respondents said that they either 'never noticed' or that they 'completely ignore' advertisements on Facebook. This seems to be a surprisingly high proportion – especially when considering the fact that advertisements, as all of the above presented, appear directly in one's *newsfeed*. Political propaganda is often delivered in the same manner as advertising on Facebook, using the same mechanisms which consumer advertising employs. While one thinks one can ignore advertisements and remain unaffected by them, in reality their messages still impact on one. It is important to remember that advertising's effectiveness is not reliant on persuading every person, or even a large proportion of the people exposed to the advertisement, to buy the product. If we apply the same logic to narratives

on Facebook which appear to be true but are actually spurious and misleading, it does not matter that *you* can discern it to be fake, someone will still probably believe it.

After all Facebook entices people to believe that they are the centre of their own universe(solipsism) – what I call its solipsistic nature – and this may make them more trusting and less questioning of any information they are fed via the site. Furthermore it becomes a space of socially constructive influence in relation to this, as it is structurally akin to a *panopticon,* where ones' social connections assume the role of administrator (see chapter 4) and one is compelled to maintain a constant degree of visibility. This impulse, the notion of the centrality of the self, is a core aspect of in the creation of the *habitus* of Facebook. Perhaps owing to its genesis as a social media platform that could only be accessed from a personal computer, it fitted well with the neoliberal ideals of personal consumption and self-interest as a measure of self-worth. Facebook gained enormous reach and popularity, just at the moment when the rapid improvement in mobile technology and the falling costs of manufacturing smart phones meant that before long everyone could afford to carry such a phone on their person which would be capable of chronicling their every movement in real time on Facebook. The self at the centre of one's universe became, at least in theory, always visible.

One is compelled to reveal aspects of one's life to the never-ending gaze of administrators, this is what constitutes social existence. The existence of 'fake news' and fake media, as well as the shift towards greater privacy, can be given as reasons why there has been a decline in 'slacktivism'. However, this form of response still returns occasionally when a worthy cause needs to be championed, however with a plurality of views and the notion that the oppressed and the suffering can through social media speak for themselves. One can post issues about which one feels strongly, and even express support for it by changing one's profile picture as an expression of solidarity or support. Facebook has shown that it is willing to suggest what causes should be championed, with the 'French flag filter' and the 'celebrate pride filter' mentioned above. However, it appears that contemporary activist engagement is a rare and fleeting phenomenon. The #Kony2012 campaign attracted widespread support from the Facebook global community, with many A-list celebrities expressing 'slacktivist' support through 'sharing'. This was perhaps one of the last major examples of the fetishization of distant human suffering, with social media providing those in distress with an opportunity to be heard. 'Slacktivism' of the 'white (Western) saviour industrial complex' may well be a trend of the past. #Kony2012 was a telling case in point for 'slacktivism', because even after all the celebrity endorsements and the millions of dollars had been raised, the Ugandan warlord, Joseph Kony, who was the focus of the media campaign, was still a free man. More importantly for this critique, is that nobody still talks about the issue any longer.

When the #FeesMustFall protests started at the University of Pretoria, the protests were branded with a hash-tag, and so 'the revolution will be *tweeted*' and, by extension, shared on Facebook. Students who did not turn out for protest marches could express their support via Facebook. If one took to the streets the moment of protest was fetishized with a post and celebrated in that same moment. The voices of protest can still be heard, perhaps by a few and for a fleeting moment, but they are just another set of opinions in a sea of noise, seen to trend only for the moment, a day or a week. The structures of power seem impervious to this form of online activism, or noise – one's opinion is easily brushed aside unless it is appropriated or consumed as a quoted expression of emotion that serves the agendas of those in power, thus fracturing the idea of collective challenge to power. Those wielding power appear to be increasingly naked, and yet become even more untouchable, and even more out of reach. I am not suggesting here that the #FeesMustFall protests failed to accomplish any of their objectives, and certainly the use of Facebook was important in creating a countrywide mimetic front for the student protesters.

However, what the protests showed is that media attention is factional and fleeting. Many posts reflected individual users' personal consumption of the act of protest as if it were a commodity: hence one saw personal messages to friends regarding how remarkable users considered themselves to be in branding themselves as protesters. Again, I do not suggest that all of the #FeesMustFall protesters were of this ilk. Much timely and valuable information was also shared on Facebook about the protests.

The only truly public voices have become those for whom it profits to pay for an increasingly finely segmented and receptive consumer audience, as if they were laughing at the net-utopian dream of a free and open, democratic internet, free of corporate influence. We still share our lives, our consumable moments and our happy times with increasingly private circles of friends. These moments seem to be consumed only as spectacle, and self-centred press releases become our public expression – which reinforces the idea of Facebook as a public space – Facebook is not actually a public space, and arguably impedes the formation of collectivities. One respondent told me: "It made me so angry that I had to hear about my brother's new-born child on FACEBOOK! Not even a phone call? [Or a personal email?]" She did, however, deem to 'like' the post, and still goes onto Facebook with a distaste for the platform which soon passes. Being a user of Facebook seems unavoidable, unless one wants to be left out in the cold and to be excluded from getting news about key developments in the lives of one's friends. This goes to reiterate the idea that even if my respondents were apathetic to, or even found it not to be a space that they would expect to find out personal things about loved ones, they are still on the platform, they still use it as a means of communication. Even if her brother meant no harm by using this medium, assumed, by her to be too impersonal – in a sense 'public' – form of

communication, to communicate something that she would consider to be very personal, there is often no recourse, because as he said "you already knew, because of Facebook", as in the idea that this could not be negative. It is in this way that one is always driven back to the platform, and as I have tried to show through this inquiry, this connection becomes fraught with concerns about how Facebook itself extracts profit from its 'free' service – as well as how users negotiate the spaces between their public and private engagement within the affordances which the platform provides. This creates to some degree the apathy towards the platform, but at the same time reiterates the social construction which the platform proposes. One that is not much different from the way in which traditional media may prioritise narrative according to whom has paid for a specific narrative on events. Furthermore Facebook I argue creates a *habitus* of communication, and even social interaction, despite resistance to the *idea* of such taking place, because of physical means of connection and the 'ease'(free) with which the platform provides this connection.

This has thus become our *habitus* of connection: ever more privatised, ever more segmented. The impulse then is to look inward to create a self-serving ideology with the technical meta-friend of Facebook holding one's hand and reassuring one that everything is OK, segmenting one into easily influenced groups under the banner of self-affirming 'privacy' and self-sufficiency: segmented into one's own quantifiable webs of connection, assuring us that this is where the 'social' happens.

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I began this research project looking at how protest, therefore public, messages are expressed on what has become an increasingly – with the intent of becoming total – social mediator with the expectation to, to some extent, find that the utopian dreams of 'the internet' challenging 'power' are made easier by this free social platform. This was the initial hope, but over time I have come to realise that that the 'gatekeepers' as well as the gates of this communication may in fact operate on a different level from the idea of the 'message', and indeed when these metrics are applied to a 'cause' it may stratify it, and by this very action create a state where amongst other completely fragmented ideas which to you as an individual(individually marketed resource) become less of a priority and more of a way in which to present oneself, in what has become a semi-public sphere. What Facebook seems to be doing is reifying the public sphere, but at the same time, and in the same breath privatising – to all intents and purposes 'globally' – this idea of the 'public' to make it ever more palatable to 'consumers' - and perhaps make the 'consumers' more profitable to it by commodifying and in the background selling the 'consumers' attention.

This has real implications for people for whom Facebook seems to be 'the internet'. Facebook as an entity, to be a means of connection, in places of distant suffering, it seems that in a post digital divide people are encouraged to construct *their public* keeping undesirable aspects of the greater public at bay. Yet it becomes for many the only connection to the 'outside' world, but at the same time this 'outside' us proposed as an ever present threat to the 'inside' world. So this very conception of what is 'outside' or 'inside' becomes tangibly fluid. This may be due to the simple fact that the world is too pluralistic, to understand anything. When 'post-truth' was named 'word of the year' (2016)[92] by Oxford Dictionaries, there seems to be only one constant, the meta-friend that is Facebook itself, that which shows *you* what your friends think is true.

In this dissertation I noted, through an analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data of Facebook use by respondents attending the University of Pretoria. Among the phenomena I observed was the rise of misinformation, and relatedly the decrease of the use of the site for activism or a sense of public communication, as well as an increasing fetishization of the idea of the 'social' that becomes ever more ubiquitous, to the point of *habitus*. All of these issues stem from a deeper imperative that, what is a space for social connectedness, through making connections into quantifiable objects is able to monetise connection, in a way that is completely alien, but inescapable for those between whom the connections take place. Despite this, as well as the fact that this made many respondents have a decidedly apathetic view of the site, the user base of the site seems to be constantly growing its user base to the point where it becomes a completely normalised and ubiquitous fact of life.

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[92]https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016

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