The London School of Economics and Political Science

VOICE THROUGH SILENCE

Algorithmic Visibility, Ordinary Civic Voices and Bottom-up Authoritarianism in the Brazilian Crisis

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Declaration

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Abstract

From 2013 to 2018, Brazil was encapsulated in a multisited crisis that unsettled its political order. Unlike other turmoil in the country's history, this one was strongly influenced by ordinary Brazilians who found a space to express themselves politically on digital platforms. This thesis aims to understand how the datafied government of users' visibility by Facebook (Brazil's most popular platform) can be understood to have structured these everyday experiences and, in so doing, to have prompted these individuals to (re)constitute the ways they act and comprehend themselves as citizens.

To investigate these processes of civic becoming, the thesis develops a conceptual framework that uses elements of social practices theory to bridge critical notions of citizenship, recognition, datafication, and visibility. It is proposed that one of Facebook's primary power techniques is the attempt to direct how the algorithmic visibility regime that supports its business model is imagined by users so as to try to prefigure these users' actions.

A thematic analysis of interviews with 47 users suggests that the ambiguous knowability of the platform's machine learning algorithms gives rise to three sociomaterial imaginaries of its algorithmic visibility regime. Combined with assumptions about Brazil's troubled democracy, these imaginaries (and the imagined others that populate them) are found to generate a paradoxical understanding of how civic worth is granted on Facebook, according to which being heard often depends on silencing others and oneself – a phenomenon theorised as bottom-up authoritarianism.

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"Once it is formed, a system takes on a life of its own**"**

1Q84 – Haruki Murakami

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

The image in my memory seems intact. It is a night in June 2013. I am in Brasília, leaning against the ramp of the *Congresso Nacional*. I examine the construction – two narrow rectangles of glass and concrete framed within two enormous plates, playful semi-spherical representations of the Senate and the House of Representatives. The construction appears, as ever, oddly opulent; however, its surroundings are occupied by strangers. Large groups of teenagers are sitting on the lawn, giggling as they look at their phones. The small pond has been occupied by young Black men, who, shirtless, are throwing water at each other. A man runs – screaming for some unfathomable reason. A small crowd starts to occupy the roof of the building. Onlookers hold up their phones, filming non-stop, maybe as amazed as I am. I remember thinking about the surrealism of what I was witnessing. Perhaps strangest of all was that, for some time, there were no authority figures – police officers, men in suits, the military – to be seen. It was as if the usual occupants of that bureaucratic palace, designed in the 1950s to mark Brazil's then (seemingly) irresistible democratization, had been expelled by the uninvited guests. Suddenly, someone began to chant: "*Oooh, o gigante acordou, o gigante acordou*" [the giant has woken up, the giant has woken up]. In a state of seeming bewilderment, others joined in. By "giant" they meant "we": *we* have woken up, *we, the Brazilian people* will not accept that a tiny elite keeps pretending that we do not exist. I felt a shiver and an urge to join in the singing, but this would have been weird behaviour. I was a journalist, wearing an obvious badge. It had been a busy reporting day: several other government buildings in the same area had been occupied, some of them violently. Similar events were happening not just in Brasilia alone, nor just on that one day. Throughout June 2013, Brazil lived a democratic oneiric scenario – sometimes dreamlike, sometimes nightmarish. Street demonstrations of a size never before seen in the country broke out in most of the main cities, often followed by bloody responses from the police. Those protests seemed conjured by some sort of magic: there was no single reason for the turmoil, no one had ordered those people to be there – or so I thought. I remember interviewing a teenager. Why are you here?, I asked. He replied, slightly perplexed by my question: "*Everyone* was coming, what do you mean?". In fact there *were* people who were telling "everyone" to be there. Not in the mainstream media of the kind I was working for, but on the Internet and, most likely, Facebook, whose number of Brazilian users were mushrooming at the time. In my memory, the protesters continued to chant about a giant that wakes up, until they were suddenly interrupted by a boom and a cloud of white smoke. I looked and could see officers approaching, wearing black helmets and holding tear gas guns. At first, the people

returned to their song, but the burning smell soon became unbearable. People were coughing, running, someone slipped among the shards of glass covering the ground; I also ran. It would not be long before the building was returned to its traditional occupants.

During the time this thesis was produced, it had become commonplace in Brazil's public commentary to say that June 2013 and its sudden and angry multitudes were not over (Sakamoto, 2015; Ortellado, 2019). There is some truth in this. Recalling that night in Brasilia, it contained elements of what would come to define the *Brazilian crisis*, which in this thesis I describe as the multisited turbulence that, between 2013 and 2018, disrupted the Brazilian political landscape. Already occurring were the rebirth of a dormant nationalism, the vanishing of a decaying political elite, a sense of regression and – perhaps primarily – the prominence of a certain political actor and of a certain political space. The actor is the "ordinary people",[1] whose unimportance had so far been a defining trait of Brazilian democracy. The space is datafied platforms, in particular Facebook, the most popular of its kind in Brazil. The demonstrations that mesmerized the country since 2013, the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the far-right landslide victory in the 2018 elections – all these collective occurrences which, in Brazil's public discourse, have become known as "the crisis" would be unthinkable without the actions of such individuals in these (and other) online spaces, as Chapter 2 argues.

However, this study is concerned with not how these ordinary people created "the crisis", but whether and how the everyday experience of creating the "critical events" (Das, 1995) of the crisis, as lived by them on platforms*, (re)constituted these individuals as citizens*. Certainly, the unfolding of such processes does not depend on crises. But they seem to be accelerated by turmoil, which renders more vivid the urgency to act, "and [makes] their contrast with 'passive citizenship'… more conspicuous" (Balibar, 2015, p. 128). Comparable processes of civic becoming have been extensively investigated in relation to legal frameworks – that is, how individuals begin to be political by performing and claiming their rights (e.g. Isin, 2008; Zivi, 2012). While rights might be underlying the processes this study analyses, my main interest is in a relatively new form of structure – that enacted by the datafication operations developed by platforms to govern the visibility of their end users. How did Facebook's engineered patterns of seeing and reading (which I theorize as an *algorithmic visibility regime*) shape the way those Brazilians ordinary end users acted and understood themselves as

[1] In this study, "ordinary people" refers to individuals whose political participation happens outside of political organizations and do not identify as "activists". They are referred to, also, as "ordinary end users", or, for stylistic reasons, as simply "end users" and "users" – although I realize that not all end users are "ordinary". See Sections 3.2 and 4.4.2.

citizens (what I theorize as their *civic voices*) during the crisis? This is the question that this thesis addresses.

The significance of the constitution of citizens might appear self-evident. After all, citizens are often seen as the typical subjects of democracy. They are the ones who are expected to vote, discuss, protest and hold their rulers accountable. As critical legal scholar Julie Cohen (2013, p. 1912) summarizes, a "democratic society cannot sustain itself without citizens who possess the capacity for democratic self-government". At the same time, political theorists have long pointed out that the relationship between citizenship and democracy is paradoxical (Mouffe, 2000). As a system of government, democracy has come to be associated with the establishment and enforcement of equal and universal individual rights, an endeavour which, in order supposedly to guarantee some basic level of freedom to all, partially curtails the sovereignty of citizens (cf. Balibar, 2015; Young, 2000). Solutions to this paradox are necessarily contingent, Mouffe argues (see also Wolin, 2016), and their stability depends on whether they are realized, accepted and resisted by these citizens. Therefore, by looking into the constitution of citizens one can observe a crucial terrain where the normative nature of democratic culture is disputed and defined. Mouffe and others are keen to stress the "democratic deficit" of post-Cold War Western democracies, that is, how a particular interpretation of what count as "individual rights", centred on free enterprise, was eroding the rule of the demos (cf. Crouch, 2004; Ranciére, 2006; Brown, 2015; Norris, 2011; Mair, 2013). In this view, the ideal of "liberal democracy" is often a mirage. This certainly applies to the case of Brazil – but for historically different reasons.

1.2. The Contradictions of Democracy in Brazil

The very attempt to create a democratic society is relatively new for Brazil (Avritzer, 2018; Carvalho, 2002). Anthropologist James Holston (2008) points out that the country's political history is characterized by an "inclusively inegalitarian citizenship". That is, social differences originate not in decisions regarding membership of a national community (which from early on was granted universally), but through an unequal "distribution of rights, meanings, institutions and practices that membership entails to those deemed citizens" (Holston, 2008, p. 7; cf. Carvalho, 2002). This is not to say that Brazil is a "deviant" democracy – after all, as I have just noted, supposedly "correct" models also fall short of their promises. Nevertheless, its particular development has engendered what was described, at least until some years ago, as a "low intensity democracy" (Arantes, 2014, p. 718). The electorate usually vote without direct interference and the three branches of the government are more or less functional, but, despite localized attempts to implement radical participatory policies (Avritzer, 2006), democracy is "still very undemocratic" (Nobre, 2013, p. 7). Certainly, subalterns have

always fought, in one way or another, against inequalities, state authoritarianism and the acute elitism of Brazil's society (Holston, 2008, pp. 18-19; cf. Alonso, 2018). However, their efforts were either violently repressed, ignored or co-opted into ambivalent institutional arrangements such as those created after the end of the military dictatorship in 1985.

Since then, non-electoral participation expanded – but tended to be led by a few organized groups (unions, social movements, parties), which often were subordinated to the state, and seldom impactful (Avritzer, 2012).[2] Even the celebrated rise, in 2002, of the centre-left *PT*, or *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (hereafter the Workers' Party), did not alter the essence of Brazil's forced solution to its democratic paradox: in the name of some rights, people had to relinquish most of their sovereignty and accept a profoundly corrupt, inefficient and unjust state (Nobre, 2013; Singer, 2018). Whilst living in an electoral democracy, and under the rule of the so-called "Citizen Constitution" promulgated in 1988, ordinary Brazilians remained "neutralized", largely impotent observers of the rulers their vote put in power (Nobre, 2013a).

This backdrop helps to clarify the historical significance of what erupted in 2013. In essence, the crisis suggested that, perhaps, Brazil was not necessarily a "low intensity democracy". The highly mobilized citizens behind the turmoil appeared radically different from the inert "Brazilians" which we Brazilians had come to expect. Even without the support of established organizations, their protests were far larger and more consequential than those organized by generations of social movements. The disruptive emergence of these citizens seemed (at least initially) to signal the sudden deepening of a long and convoluted process of assimilation of "the people" into Brazilian society (Carvalho, 2017). Unsurprisingly, the events of June 2013 were deemed a "democratic shock", in which a "majority" had decided to "take on the system" (Nobre, 2013a, p. 15). From early on, datafied platforms were seen as decisive to the crisis. It was argued that the alleged "radical pluralism" of these spaces robbed the "traditional media" of "the monopoly of the formation of the public opinion" and generated independent "channels" to organize the "fight against the system, taking the revolt to the streets" (Nobre, 2013a, pp. 13-14).

Yet, in the literature on the turmoil, this initial amazement at the disruptive novelty of these newly politicized citizens (and at the novel spaces of participation in which they emerged) was not followed up by substantive debate. As the turmoil gelled into institutional processes and decisions,

[2] There are significant exceptions: e.g. the "Painted Faces" movement, which contributed to the impeachment of the then president, Fernando Collor de Mello, in 1991; and the "March of the 100,000", demonstrating against the then president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, in 1999.

more attention was given to traditional actors and organizations (politicians, parties, the Judiciary) and the role of mainstream media (see e.g. Singer, 2018; Anderson, 2019; Avritzer, 2018; Bueno, Burigo, Pinheiro-Machado, & Solano, 2018). The ordinary people whose everyday online actions on datafied platforms had been instrumental to sustain and nurture the crisis began to be taken-for-granted. Likewise, despite a continuous acknowledgment of the importance of these platforms (and, later on, of messaging apps such as WhatsApp), the particular role of these spaces in enabling those actions – and those citizens – remain understudied.

This gap is important, for, as it has become glaringly clear, platforms are not only "spaces of autonomy" (Castells, 2015, p. 2). They are themselves involved in politically consequential new forms of control.

1.3. Rise of Datafication, Demise of Democracy?

Over the last 30 years, scholars from various disciplines have investigated how the Internet implicated in the way people organize and discuss about political issues. The result is a vast literature, which has oscillated between optimistic and sceptical positions (for summaries, see e.g. Ess, 2018; Feenberg, 2017; Stromer-Galley, 2014; Loader & Mercea, 2011; Coleman & Blumler, 2009; DiMaggio, Hargittai, Newman, & Robinson, 2001; Street, 1997; see Mansell, 2012 for a broader overview). At the time of writing (July 2019), the pendulum was strongly swinging towards scepticism. The widespread view amongst critical academics was that digital networks, once thought of as bearing the promise of revitalization (Benkler, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Castells, 2009) of an allegedly declining democracy (Putnam, 2000), have become a threat to democracy. The current pessimism in the literature may have been initially catalysed by the revelations of Edward Snowden in 2013 about global surveillance (Greenwald, 2014). However, it also seems to stem chiefly from an earlier fundamental change to the configuration of the main online spaces of participation, I suggest.

In the last 10 years, a small number of these spaces have risen to positions of market and cultural dominance (Moore & Tambini, 2018). Unlike their predecessors, these platforms are fully *datafied*, a neologism indicating that they are underpinned by *datafication* – the "transformation of social action into online quantified data" enacted by "real-time tracking" that allows for "predictive analysis" executed by machine learning algorithmic systems (van Dijck, 2014, p. 198, critiquing Mayer-Schonberger & Cukier, 2013). As a consequence, long-lasting concerns about how online political participation may be hindered by offline inequalities, such as those related to education, income, gender and race (Blank, 2013; Hargittai, 2008; Brady, Schlozman, & Verba, 1999; Harp & Tremayne,

2006; Baek, Wojcieszak, & Delli Carpini, 2012; Graham, Straumann & Hogan, 2015), have been compounded or overtaken by worries about digital surveillance, ideological polarization and micro-targeting (for a summary, see Benkler, Faris, & Roberts, 2018, p. 21). Related problems have been studied for a long time (Gandy, 1993; Lyon, 1994; McChesney, 1996; Poster, 1997; Noam, 2001; Deibert, 2003; Howard, 2005; Dahlberg, 2005; Cammaerts, 2008). However, these were usually considered extrinsic to or rare in the online social experience of end users (e.g. Castells, 2009, pp. 2010-16; Benkler, 2006, p. 261). Now, they are understood as positioned at the core of these platforms' business model.

Journalistic and academic works have come to associate datafied platforms[3] with the alleged end of "the hegemony of liberal democracy" (Mounk, 2017, p. 16). Even when not focused on media *per se*, many of these writings give substantial weight to datafied platforms. As the title of one article asked, "Can democracy survive the Internet"? (Persily, 2017). The turning point seems to have occurred in 2016, with the result of the Brexit referendum in the UK and the election of Donald Trump in the US. Since then, liberal political theorists have denounced the apparent re-emergence of "populism" (e.g. Mounk 2018; Runciman, 2018; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; see also Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). Others seem more concerned with the possible renascence of "fascism" (Albright, 2018; Stanley, 2018) and the forms it might take today (Traverso, 2019; cf. Riley, 2018), or with how to use this moment of instability to (finally) democratize democracy from the left (Mouffe, 2018). The widespread usage in these works of terms like "echo chambers", "algorithms" and "bots", and discussions of the relationship between these terms and "fake news", signal the greater emphasis now given to the inner workings of datafied platforms.

This thesis dialogues with the broad object of these concerns – the shifting character of democracy in an increasingly datafied social world. However, it does so from a distinct angle, less concerned with macro dynamics than with individuals' micro transformations.

1.4. Conceptual and Methodological Directions

The investigation of how ordinary end users may (re)constitute themselves as citizens through their political expressions on Facebook invokes problems in which much of the literature on the relationship between datafied platforms and politics is not typically interested. Usually, the notion of citizen is seen from a naturalist perspective, where it appears as an already present actor who must

[3] Datafied platforms (or simply "platforms") is how this thesis refers to what is often named "social media" and "social media platforms". See Section 3.5 for a discussion about the term.

be engaged, cajoled, coerced, incited, invited, and encouraged (Isin & Ruppert, 2015, p. 15). In this view, very little is said about how these people come into being not only as receivers of the actions of more powerful or better organized actors (technologists, politicians, political parties, consultants, bureaucrats, professional activists) but also as agents endowed with the socially situated capacity to produce meaning and act upon it.

Therefore, the processes of civic becoming in which I am interested can be studied most realistically from a non-naturalist[4] perspective (Bevir & Blakely, 2016) on citizenship, as I suggest in Chapter 3. The central assumption of this standpoint is that citizenship might be seen as a reflective practice whereby individuals construct their subjective sense of being political agents vis-à-vis multiple structures. This non-naturalist view provides a starting point for this study, but it does not offer the conceptual framework that I judge ideal to answer my research question. In order to develop this framework, this thesis builds a largely novel conceptual vocabulary.

The first step is the confection of an analytical foundation. To do so, I resort to elements of social practices theory. My approach is eclectic. I arrive at a definition of *structure* from Sewell's (1992) theory of resources and schemas and Taylor's (2004) conceptualization of social imaginaries. Based on the phenomenological take of Emirbayer and Mische (1998), I then describe *agency* as a form of reflexivity through which individuals engage in schematizations of the world and concoct projects on how to act upon this world. Lastly, Schatzki's (2002) reading of Foucault's late work informs my definition of *power* as the ordering of actions' meanings – i.e. their prefiguration.

These definitions of structure, agency and power are then rearticulated to develop this thesis' two main concepts. The first one is *civic voice*, which results from a partial overhaul of the notion of citizenship as practice. As media sociologist Nick Couldry (2010) argues, at the core of the idea of voice is the idea of recognition – something that is implied, but rarely detailed in many non-naturalist accounts of citizenship. The need to be heard by others prompts individuals to express themselves; in having these expressions heard (or not), they might (re)constitute how they understand themselves as citizens. Being heard is also a pre-condition for civic autonomy, becoming therefore a requirement for a "democratic ethical life", as argued by social philosopher Axel Honneth (2014). Therefore, more than helping to clarify how citizens come into being, the concept of civic voice offers a normative parameter which allows for the consideration of whether certain civic voices are democratic or

[4] Against naturalist views, this term designates broadly the philosophical assumption that "human beliefs and actions are expressive of meanings" (Bevir & Blakely, 2016, p. 31). See Section 3.2.

authoritarian. As a self-representational political project, this kind of voice is structured by implicit and contextual assumptions of how civic recognition is granted – what I term civic imaginary. Furthermore, whether and how a civic voice expression can be recognized (or not) depends on whether and how such expression can be made visible. This is a primary reason why datafied platforms are crucial for the development of civic voices: their main object of control is precisely the visibility of end users.

My second main concept, *algorithmic visibility regime*, is an attempt to theorize how this kind of datafication power appears to be exerted by Facebook. Building on critical data studies and sociological accounts of visibility, this regime is described as a form of structure that entangles two vectors of visibility: how end users *see* and *are seen* on platforms (a definition usually made by "intelligent" algorithmic decision-making), and how they are *read by* platforms (often through pervasive dataveillance). I suggest that one of Facebook's central techniques to control end users' actions is the attempt to materialize these datafication operations in a way that influences how the same operations are understood by these users. Facebook's business model seems to be importantly based on the expectation that, in materializing dataveillance as "invisible" and algorithmic decisions as "personalized", end users might understand the news feed as somehow "relevant". In turn, I propose that this understanding could then lead end users to qualify (i.e. prefigure) actions toward the interface as "enticing" and all actions toward its infrastructure as "impossible".

If this is the case, one could propose that the datafication operations of Facebook's algorithmic regime shape end users' civic voice indirectly. Such conceptualization might begin with considerations that are not necessarily civic: (1) how users make sense of such particularly materialized visibility regime, and (2) which social imaginaries arise from these schematizations. These imaginaries might then be associated with end users' likely attempts to (3) expand and (4) reduce the visibility of their civic voice expressions so as to be heard on the platform. I am particularly interested in which ways these projects of visibility control, as I name them, entail adjustments to how civic voice itself is expressed and (mis)recognized on Facebook, influencing thus the (re)constitution of civic self-understandings – i.e. end users' civic becoming. The four aspects mentioned in this paragraph correspond to the thesis' four empirical chapters (Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, respectively – see last section of this chapter).

These conceptual choices and constructs create methodological possibilities, as explained in Chapter 4. Since civic voice is deeply rooted in reflexivity, and datafication might be susceptible to

being imagined by individuals who are not necessarily tech-savvy, those ordinary people who largely drove the Brazilian crisis might be asked about the ways in which they constructed ideas of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime. They may also be asked how these ideas, if consolidated into social imaginaries, influenced (or not) the way they might express themselves politically on this platform during the crisis. In my fieldwork, undertaken mostly in São Paulo in early 2017, I posed questions about these aspects in interviews with 47 of these individuals. I recruited end users who self-identified as having become politically engaged after 2013 – mostly on Facebook – but who did not see themselves as activists nor members of formal political organizations.

1.5. Aims

This study hopes to contribute, first and foremost, to discussions on the civic ramifications of the commercial use of datafication to govern end users' visibility. While an extensive literature has already emerged to describe, explain and critique some of these ramifications (usually focussed on privacy), not much has been written from the interpretive conceptual perspective adopted in this thesis, and even less so on ordinary end users (as opposed to social movements and activists). Secondly, this thesis aims to contribute to broader debates on the nature and dynamics of platforms' datafication power, whose consequences are not limited to the civic sphere. In this regard, there is no shortage of studies, as Sections 3.5.1 and 3.5.2 demonstrate. But few works have explicitly theorized on how to bridge concerns with datafication operations and people's agential relationship to these operations, as my conceptual framework does.

Throughout the production of this thesis, I considered whether my conclusions could also shed light on the transformation of democracy in post-2013 Brazil. Ultimately, I realized that my research was too limited, and Brazil's transformation too complex, for any substantive contribution to be made. Thus, while the Brazilian troubled polity played a crucial role in my fieldwork and analysis (see in particular Section 9.5.1), it was treated as only the background to the thesis. (This is not to say that tentative ideas were not raised – see Section 10.3.)

The main conclusion from this research indicates that the combination of interviewees' assumptions about citizenship in Brazil's ambiguous democracy and their imaginaries of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime end up engendering a paradoxical understanding of how to be heard on Facebook – a civic imaginary that seems peculiar to the platform. According to this understanding, having one's civic voice heard on Facebook often depends on controlling one's visibility through the silencing of others and oneself. I describe this structural misrecognition dynamic as *bottom-up*

authoritarianism. This insight will be shown to reveal a distinct relationship between civic autonomy and datafication, in which the former is structurally undermined not (only) by authoritarians and ruthless private conglomerates, but by ordinary end users themselves. The notion of bottom-up authoritarianism emerges in this thesis inductively, and should be understood as the culmination of the indirect shaping of civic voice by Facebook's datafication operations mentioned in the previous section. Chapter 9 conceptualizes in detail the multiple aspects of this shaping process and explains how they are related.

The last section of this chapter provides an overview of the thesis.

1.6. Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 sets the empirical context. First, I examine the problematic history of Brazil's political organization and then the 2013-2018 crisis, pointing to the centrality in it of ordinary end users of datafied platforms.

In **Chapter 3,** I develop the conceptual framework which underpins my empirical investigation. After defining the notions of civic voice and algorithmic visibility regime, the framework indicates how this regime may be theorized as shaping ordinary end users' civic voices on Facebook. Sub research questions are stated.

Chapter 4 describes the methodological basis of this study. It suggests that my interest in people's sensemaking experiences, social imaginaries and practices justifies the use of a constructivist epistemology and a qualitative method. The chapter defends the choice of an in-depth interview method, explains the procedures followed during my fieldwork in Brazil, and discusses how data analysis was carried out. Considerations on research ethics are also debated.

Chapter 5 begins the analysis of the interviews. Based on the concept of schematization, it examines how interviewees make sense of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime.

Chapter 6 analyses which social imaginaries of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime emerge from the schematizations examined in Chapter 5. My investigation suggests that there are three, non-mutually exclusive imaginaries that all interviewees appeared to hold.

Chapter 7 addresses whether and how participants[5] of this study reported trying to expand the visibility of their civic voice on Facebook with the aim of having their voice heard. It discusses how the social imaginaries revealed in Chapter 6 were invoked during these actions and in what ways these invocations relate to the participants' civic self-understandings.

The last empirical chapter is **Chapter 8**. It has a similar structure and analytical approach to Chapter 7, but analyses projects that interviewees reported as constructed to *reduce* the visibility of their civic voice expressions.

The empirical findings of Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 are re-examined in **Chapter 9**. This is the main analytical chapter of the thesis. It sets out this study's conceptual insights in regard to each of the sub research questions, culminating with the notion of bottom-up authoritarianism.

Finally, **Chapter 10** recaps the empirical and conceptual findings to highlight the contributions of this thesis to the debates on the civic ramifications of datafication and on the datafication power of platforms. It also discusses some limitations of this research and suggests directions for future work.

Next, in Chapter 2, I discuss in more detail the real-life circumstances described at the beginning of Chapter 1 – the onset of the Brazilian crisis and Its unfolding.

[5] The terms "interviewees" and "participants" are used interchangeably to refer to the subjects I interviewed during my fieldwork.

Chapter 2

Brazil in Turmoil

2.1. Introduction

This chapter situates the reader in the broader empirical context which informs this thesis, the Brazilian crisis. It highlights some of the momentous events usually associated with the turmoil and provides an indication based on available sources of the extent to which this crisis implicated ordinary people – mostly through their everyday political expressions on online spaces such as Facebook. This is discussed in the third section of this chapter. To understand the significance of and conditions surrounding the emergence of these citizens, it is essential to understand the basic characteristics of Brazil's democracy (the first section of this chapter) and to provide some factual background to the crisis that engulfed the country from 2013 to 2018 (the second section of this chapter).

2.2. A 'Low Intensity' Democracy

This section identifies three main characteristics of Brazil's political organization throughout its history: inequality, state authoritarianism and acute elitism. These traits help to explain why Brazil's democracy can be described as underdeveloped.

The country's inequalities can be understood in the context of three inherently linked categories: race, gender and income.[6] Beginning in the 19th century (Schwarcz, 2018), academic, state and media discourses largely denied these asymmetries, peddling the founding myths of Brazilian national identity being underpinned by an alleged harmonious "racial democracy" and a supposed predisposition of the Brazilian people to be "cordial" (see Freyre, 1933; cf. Buarque de Holanda, 1995/1936; DaMatta, 1979; Guimarães, 1995; Souza, 2003). This interpretation has been challenged in more recent decades. In particular, amongst Marxist and post-Marxist scholars, it has become widely accepted that racism, sexism and socioeconomic inequalities, while nearly universal, are particularly intense and harmful in Brazil (although see e.g. Magnoli, 2009). This is not to say that the country is not racially hybrid (*mestiço*), that such hybridity cannot be beneficial to racially marginalized groups, or that Brazilians do not pride themselves on being welcoming and generous. However, many

[6] Other forms of inequalities, such as geographical (see Silva, 2017) and educational (see Menezes Filho & Kirschbaum, 2018) influence the functioning of Brazil's democracy. I do not consider the former because as Chapter 4 shows, this study focuses on a single area (São Paulo, Brazil's richest city); in the context of my research, the latter can be subsumed within the other divides.

argue that these ideas have perpetuated the inequalities they allegedly sought to erase (Starling & Schwarcz, 2017).

Brazilian racism originates, mainly, in the country's Portuguese colonial past, when slavery was a central feature of society. Not only were Blacks and indigenous people obliged to wait until 1934 to be granted formal voting rights, but a deeply ingrained prejudice against them has continued to be a defining element of Brazilian society (Fernandes, 1964), as multiple empirical studies confirm (e.g. Venturi & Bokani, 2005; Schwarcz, 1996). Although composing more than half of the population, *Negros* (non-Whites) remain a tiny minority in institutional politics (e.g. only 3% of the elected politicians in 2014, at all levels – Sardinha, 2014). Another important form of inequality relates to gender. While women make up the majority of the population, they represent only 15% of the Congress, for instance (Montesanti, 2018). Sexism is associated to world-leading levels of domestic violence (Artigo 19, 2018) and pervasive prejudice and physical violence against LGBT people (Cowie, 2018; Transgender Europe, 2016). Lastly, there is a profound income divide. Wealth concentration in Brazil is the third highest in the world (Alvaredo, Chancel, Piketty, Saez, & Zucman, 2018). Such an economic divide helps to explain why, despite Brazil achieving average global GDP per capita, more than one quarter of its population is poor or extremely poor (IBGE, 2018). Income indicators are strongly correlated to race and gender (Ipea, 2017).

In addition to these deep, multiple and chronic inequalities, Brazil has a long tradition of state authoritarianism. While some kind of voting rights date back to 1824 (Schwarcz, 2018), for more than 110 years these rights applied to only a small proportion of the population, and even these people rarely voted freely (Carvalho, 2002, p. 32; Nicolau, 2012, p. 133). The first experience resembling a democracy began in 1945 and ended in 1964, in the context of the Cold War, with an anti-communist military coup (Avritzer, 2018, p. 284). After murdering, torturing and persecuting dozens of thousands of people and producing a profound economic crisis, the autocratic regime began a so-called "slow, gradual and safe" opening process, which formally ended the dictatorship in 1985 (Gaspari, 2003). Since the succeeding 30 years have not witnessed military coups or armed insurrections, democracy, in its electoral form, is considered by some to be consolidated. However, state authoritarianism remained very much alive in the routine "accidental" killings, extrajudicial executions and torturing of both criminal and innocent citizens by police forces, which are considered "the world's most violent" (Muggah, 2016, para. 1). Racial inequality is related, closely, to this police violence (Cerqueira & Moura, 2013). Generally, Brazil has been ranked consistently amongst the top ten most violent countries in the world (UNODC, 2019).

Inequalities and state authoritarianism are linked strongly to an acute elitism. Pereira (2016) observes that dominant theorizations of this elitism coalesce around the Weberian notion of neo-patrimonialism (Faoro, 1958; Schwartzman, 1975/2007; Oliveira, 2003; Chauí, 2000; cf. Souza, 2003). In this perspective, a "heavy administrative bureaucracy", unchallenged by a "weak and poorly articulated" civil society, appropriates "functions, organizations and public resources" in favour of certain "private sectors" (Schwartzman, 1975/2007, pp. 10-11). While constrained by various transformations during the 20th century, this patrimonialist elitism remains an important interpretative frame to make sense of Brazil's central traits such as the epidemic forms of corruption (Domingues, 2012, p. 162) and the powerlessness of social minorities. It helps, also, to explain why all regime transitions have been characterized as intra-elite agreements executed regardless of or against the people (Carvalho, 2002; 2017). It would be a gross simplification to say that the population was completely isolated from these transformations. From the colonial period to the military dictatorship and after, Brazilian governments have faced continuous resistance (Gomes, 2015; Fausto, 2008, pp. 164, 295; Gorender, 1987; Holston, 2008). However, these movements were repressed, pushed back and rendered unable to advance their long-term demands.

As both a legal regime and a pattern of practices, the democracy that emerged from the military dictatorship has been described as profoundly ambiguous. In his ethnography on how working-class people became citizens by struggling for urban spaces in Brazil's large cities, James Holston (2008, p. 2) locates this ambivalence in what he terms an "inegalitarian citizenship". According to him, throughout its history, Brazilian elites have given "the people" the legal status of citizens without guaranteeing realization of their basic rights, hence, legalizing injustice. Even the disruption of these conditions often led to the development of new forms of violence, impunity and corruption (Holston, 2008, p. 271). "Neither democracy nor its counters prevail… rooted yet rotted, they remain entangled, unexpectedly surviving each other" (Holston, 2008, p. 273). In similar vein, Marcos Nobre coined the term "immobilism in movement" to explain Brazil's post-dictatorship political arrangement. From his viewpoint, the agreed and relatively pacific transition from dictatorship to democracy in the 1980s forged a political caste that developed different "shielding mechanisms": pacts between high-level politicians, bureaucrats and capitalists, aimed at defending itself from "society" without, however, openly denying "society" its rights (Nobre, 2013, p. 14; Vilhena & Barbosa, 2018). This arrangement was created by centre-right presidents and then adapted by centre-left leaders, such as Lula da Silva (who governed from 2003 to 2010) and his successor and mentee, Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016), both from the Workers' Party (Anderson, 2016; Singer, 2012).

The condition and consequence of this "immobilism in movement" was arguably a form of "low intensity democracy" (Arantes, 2014). Despite the existence of free elections, of a general respect for political freedoms and of usually functional state bodies, everyday life rarely felt like fully democratic in Brazil (Nobre, 2013, p. 7). And it was not only about injustice and insecurity. Non-electoral democratic participation remained a rare occurrence. Political parties functioned mostly as tiny elite clubs, social movements were localized, accountability institutions often failed and news media were ideologically homogenous (Schwarz, 2018; Azevedo, 2006). This tense but more or less stable coexistence of inequalities, authoritarianism and elitism with formal democratic rule imploded in 2013, initiating what this thesis refers to as the *Brazilian crisis*, the topic of the next section.

2.3. 'The Crisis'

Crises can be defined as "transitional phases, during which the normal ways of operating no longer work", that is, periods when the "core values… of a community come under *threat",* inducing "a sense of *urgency*" and a "high degree of *uncertainty* [original emphasis]" (Boin, Hart, Stern, & Sundelius, 2005, pp. 2-3; cf. Sellnow & Seeger, 2013, pp. 4-10). This section provides a description of the main collective events of the Brazilian crisis to describe how the "normal ways of operating" of Brazil's contradictory democracy have come to a grinding halt.

The crisis can be considered as constituted of three phases. Its triggering event was a series of street demonstrations in 2013, led initially by a small autonomist social movement demanding revocation of a bus fares increase. In June 2013, a fourth protest was violently repressed by the police in São Paulo, producing a strong backlash from the population. In the succeeding weeks, the country saw protests in dozens of cities. The invasion of palaces in Brasília, described at the beginning of this thesis, was one such. On 20 June alone, more than a million people took to the streets. Since there was no identifiable central movement driving these demonstrations, the acts seemed spontaneous events, abrupt materializations of a shared, but, thus far, diffuse anti-establishment sentiment. Protesters demanded better and fairer state services and an end to the corruption (Singer, 2014). People's personal Facebook accounts were the main sources of information on where and when the marches would take place and acted, also, as fora where people discussed what the protest should be about (Costa, 2013). Early analyses of this moment underscored the extent to which these events represented a break with Brazil's tradition of civic apathy and highlighted the importance of datafied platforms in their unfolding (Nobre, 2013a; see Section 1.2). When what became known as the *Marches of June*[7] finally ended, they had disrupted the political landscape. It had become clear that

[7] See UOL (2013) for a partial chronology.

mass demonstrations were possible and effective, even in the absence of any discrete unifying reason or powerful organizers. In 2014, a new wave of demonstrations emerged – focused on the overpriced stadia being constructed for the FIFA World Cup (Watts, 2014). The unstable political climate, in 2014, resulted in the *Workers' Party* facing its toughest elections since 1998. President Dilma Rousseff was re-elected with the smallest margin in the history of Brazil's presidential elections (Kingstone & Power, 2017).

The second phase of the crisis covers the short second term of office of Dilma Rousseff. It was defined by two factors. First, in this period Brazil experienced the worst recession in its history. A combination of deep cuts to public investments, a fall in the price of commodities and poorly designed tax cuts resulted in higher unemployment, inflation and base interest rates, declining wages and reduced private investment (de Carvalho, 2018). GDP shrank almost 8% over 2015 and 2016 (BBC, 2017). Second, there was the Car Wash Operation (*Operação Lava Jato*), the largest corruption scandal in a country used to major corruption scandals (Watts, 2017). The operation, led by a local federal judge (Sérgio Moro), attacked the directors of Brazil's state-owned oil company, the proprietors of large private construction companies and their godfathers and partners in the state and political parties, revealing billionaire kickback schemes (Winter, 2018). Initially lauded as a non-partisan technocratic revolution against Brazil's neopatrimonialism (Netto, 2016), the operation galvanized national dissatisfaction with the entire political elite.

Combined with the economic recession, the scandal inspired the creation of dozens of new social movements. They had a strong conservative agenda and a clear focus – the impeachment of Rousseff. Supported by international conservative organizations and by enthusiastic coverage from traditional media outlets, these groups mainly used datafied platforms such as Facebook to convene seven nationwide protests, which mobilised dozens of millions of people and resulted in the largest demonstrations in Brazil to date (Amaral, 2015; Gohn, 2017; Pinto, 2017; Tatagiba & Galvão, 2019; G1, 2016). As support for the impeachment of Rousseff rapidly increased, investigators and Judge Sérgio Moro started to engage in blatantly political actions. A taped conversation between Rousseff and Lula was leaked illegally by Moro; Lula was forced into being interviewed by the federal police; and the Workers' Party became a discursive obsession of the prosecutors (Cuadros, 2018).

The third and last phase began with the impeachment of Rousseff. Since there was no direct evidence of her involvement in the corruption scheme, the legislators took a shortcut and focused on some "creative accounting" techniques. At the same time, they were meticulous in adhering to the

protocols required for a trial. The combination of political opportunism and legal formalism left the impeachment process in an interpretive limbo, open to different narrative frames. Rousseff's defenders called it a soft coup (Jinkings, Doria, & Cleto, 2016). Her opponents described it as a legitimate process that reflected the wishes of the population (see The Economist, 2016). In 2016, Michel Temer, the centre-right vice-president, was sworn in. Also involved in the Car Wash Operation and presiding over a radical austerity programme (Aleem, 2016; Safatle, 2017), he became deeply unpopular (DataFolha, 2018). A despised political establishment, a paralyzed economy and the contestable imprisonment of former president Lula da Silva (when he was the leading presidential candidate) created a scorched-earth scenario for the far-right landslide which put in power Jair Bolsonaro in the 2018 elections (Anderson, 2019; Nicolau, 2018). Bolsonaro had been a representative in the Lower House for almost 30 years, where he was famous for his anti-LGBT views and unwavering support for the military dictatorship, torture and political violence (The Guardian, 2018).

The shocking 2018 electoral results ended the crisis as it existed so far, I suggest. Since 2013, the turbulence was driven by a strong anti-establishment disposition. By dethroning the political elite and putting in power an insider who had always behaved like an outsider, the election rendered meaningless the defining feature of the turmoil. This is not to say that Brazil returned to its pre-2013 relative steadiness. However, the nature of the turbulence seemed to have changed. Once in power, Bolsonaro started to try to undermine Brazil's already frail democratic institutions from within (Phillips, 2019). How the participatory burst of 2013 morphed into overt support for (or silent consent to) a candidate who talked openly about purging, arresting and killing rivals (Phillips, 2018; Hunter & Power, 2019) is a question that this thesis does not fully address. Nevertheless, Section 10.3 establishes some speculative connections between my conclusions and these macro changes.

The story told in this section echoes what most of the academic and journalistic literatures say about "the crisis" — as the turmoil is commonly referred to in the Brazilian public debate. In these works, the initial fascination with the supposedly spontaneous masses of 2013 and their typical online spaces (datafied platforms) gradually disappeared from view, and interest in politicians, public officials, new social movements and traditional media took centre stage (see e.g. Singer, 2018; Anderson, 2019; Avritzer, 2018; Bueno et al., 2018). Without denying the importance of these agents in the development of the crisis, the next section returns the focus to the kind of actor that this thesis is concerned with – ordinary end users.

2.4. The Dynamic Relationship Between "the Crisis" and Ordinary End Users

An important factor that rendered this turmoil a distinct juncture in the history of Brazil is that it cannot easily be summarized as a quarrel between segments of the elites – as previous crises largely were, I suggest. There was a dynamic association between "the crisis" and the everyday actions of (at least some) ordinary end users of datafied platforms such as Facebook, I point out in this section.

In general terms, some analysts have pointed out that, from 2013 to 2018, Brazil underwent an massive process of political mobilization, a "rebirth of politics" (Arantes, 2018, para. 8) which was inherently linked to arenas that did not exist in previous crises – online spaces, in particular, datafied platforms. The historical novelty of this phenomenon is well summarized by Nobre (2019, p. 9), who wrote that online participation by ordinary individuals who "have never had access to environments of political decision" may provoke "an ecstasy that has never been seen in the history of this country". This "hyper" mobilization (Ortellado, 2019, para. 6) appears to have opened "the gates for the absolute ungovernability of the country" (Arantes, 2018, para. 1). By this, the philosopher Paulo Arantes seems to mean not a complete institutional meltdown, but the difficulty experienced by the Brazilian elites to control the processes of change unleashed since 2013.

A 2018 survey on "political engagement" indicated the weight of online political expressions by ordinary end users during the crisis. Amongst 14 countries from Asia, Latin America, Europe and the Middle East, the survey found that Brazil had the highest proportion of people who posted their "own thoughts or comments on political or social issues online" in the "past year": 19% of its total population, or roughly 40 million people (Pew Research Centre, 2018). Given that 60% of the Brazilian population is connected to the Internet (CETIC.br, 2018), these numbers suggest that around one third of those who could express themselves about "political or social issues" online, did so. According to the same survey, Brazil saw the largest increase in this proportion since 2014 (the last time the same question was posed by Pew): 13 percentage points.[8]

It seems likely that many of these expressions occurred on Facebook. In fact, the accelerated growth of this platform in Brazil coincided with the development of the crisis. In 2012, immediately before the eruption of the turmoil, Facebook had 36 million users, for the first time overtaking Google's Orkut to become the most visited network by Brazilians (Comscore, 2012). In 2018, the number of users had increased by 250% and reached 127 million, or 65% of the country's non-infant population (Oliveira, 2018). While any data from Facebook regarding users should be taken with a

[8] These data should be read in the light of the fact that Brazil is ranked second in the world in terms of time spent on platforms such as Facebook (We are Social, 2019).

grain of salt (Stewart, 2018), there is little question that it is the largest datafied platform in Brazil (We are Social, 2019; StatCounter, 2019). This popularity justifies my focus on Facebook – which from now on will be alternatively referred to as "the platform".

On the one hand, this extraordinary online mobilization informed the creation of the events described in the previous section. Indeed, the three phases of the turmoil would be barely imaginable without these ordinary end users. The 2013 *Marches of June* and the anti-World Cup protests in 2014 were made possible by the usage of datafied platforms by masses of formerly demobilized people and not by social movements or political parties (Castells, 2015, pp. 230-237; Bennet & Segerberg, 2012; see Section 1.3). If the idea of truly horizontal organizations enabled by datafied platforms is simplistic (Poell, Abdulla, Rieder, Woltering, & Zack, 2016), it seems undeniable that the accelerated take up of these new media in the past decade presented a new "mediated opportunity structure" (Cammaerts, 2012) for contentious demonstrations in Brazil. In the second phase of the crisis, the 2015 and 2016 demonstrations were coordinated, in part, by the aforementioned platform-based new social movements. Yet, as it is obvious, these new activists could only play an important role in the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff because the ordinary individuals who took to the streets were massively present on platforms. Lastly, these end users were largely behind the rise of Bolsonaro, as his own campaign acknowledged on numerous occasions (Uribe, 2019). Ignored by most of the traditional news media and supported by a tiny party with almost no TV exposure, Bolsonaro existed as a public figure, essentially, on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube – and also WhatsApp. In 2018, he had, for a long time, been the most popular Brazilian politician on these platforms, where his overtly bigoted and violent views were often portrayed as courageous acts against a hypocritical political elite (Gortàzar & Becker, 2018; Utsch, 2018).

If the role of ordinary end users in the development of "the crisis" has been widely recognized, how these individuals' involvement in such a crisis appeared to have transformed *themselves* has been much less studied. There is abundant journalistic evidence on the disruptive manner in which politics infiltrated these people's private relationships, leading, commonly, to the collapse of affective and family ties (e.g. Gragnani, 2016; Rossi & Mori, 2018; Valle & Biller, 2016). At the peak of the pro-impeachment movement, this infiltration seemed to have become a topic of national concern. In 2016, the then Minister of Justice thought it important to declare that "families are suffering from a 'collective psychosis' because of political differences" and that "social media instil the most primitive instincts in people" (Amora, 2016, para. 4). Some few academics have begun to consider these personal transformations. Rosana Pinheiro-Machado and Lucia Scalzo (2018, para. 4), for instance,

point out that “national events affect not only the material conditions of existence” but also the shaping of individuals’ “political subjectivity”. In her study of supporters of Bolsonaro, Esther Solano (2018, para. 10) found what she calls the “*bolsonarization* of life”, which goes “far beyond the electoral process” and encompasses the modification of these individuals’ world view. They seemed to have developed a staunch anti-leftism and hatred of human rights (Solano, 2018, para. 8).

Despite these interesting suggestions, the association between ordinary end users’ processes of civic becoming – as I describe the transformations of previously disengaged people into politically mobilized citizens – and their quotidian political expressions on Facebook during the Brazilian crisis remain largely unexplored. This association is the empirical phenomenon that thesis investigates. In this sense, I approach the Brazilian turmoil less as “the crisis”, as described in the previous section, than as a set of “critical events” (Das, 1995, p. 6), after which new modes of action and being can emerge in a variety of spheres – not only state and bureaucracies but, perhaps primarily, everyday life. In the light of the narrative of Brazil as a “low intensity” democracy, one can see the historical relevance of these personal transformations and the resulting emergence of newly politicized citizens. The overall hope was that the country was undergoing a form of confusing but genuine democratization, *lato sensu*: the will of “the people” was finally becoming sovereign. But which “people” were in fact being mobilized? Most newly mobilized ordinary end users *did not* represent the racial, economic and social minorities who, for centuries, have been violently supressed in Brazil. Survey data indicated that these newly mobilized people were, in fact, part of the so-called “new“ (protests of 2013-2014) and older (protests of 2015-2016) middle classes (Singer, 2014). Indeed, most of the poor people have no access to the Internet (CETIC.br, 2018). I return to the debates about the notion of “ordinary” in Sections 3.2 and 4.4.2. At any rate, that even this relative expansion of political participation has proved so disruptive is evidence of Brazil's historical difficulty in creating a citizenry, as José Murilo de Carvalho (2017), a leading historian of citizenship in Brazil, argues.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter provides a brief summary of the Brazilian crisis and how it informs this study. After demonstrating the inequalities, state authoritarianism and elitism that have crippled the possibility of democracy in Brazil, I described the three main phases of “the crisis”: the 2013-2014 revolts, the 2015-2017 anti-Workers’ Party protests that ended with the impeachment of former President Dilma Rousseff, and the unpopular Michel Temer government, which paved the way to the election of radical conservative neophytes. In the third section, I showed how it is possible to understand the crisis not only as a series of collective events but also as “critical events” (Das, 1995),

linked to a myriad of ordinary actions, mostly in online spaces, and in particular on Facebook (the datafied platform my work focusses on). How this space shaped the emergence of certain politically mobilized citizens (i.e. their processes of civic becoming) is the empirical phenomenon this thesis tackles.

Chapter 3 develops a conceptual vocabulary to approach this phenomenon.

Chapter 3

Civic Voice Under Algorithmic Visibility Conditions

3.1. Introduction

Chapter 2 described the broad context in which this thesis is located, exploring the dynamic relationship between the crisis that upended Brazil's political order from 2013 to 2018 and the proliferation of ordinary individuals expressing themselves politically, usually through datafied platforms. Whether and how one of these spaces (Facebook) influenced these individuals' expressions and, in so doing, (re)constituted them as citizens, is the real-life process at the centre of this thesis research. The main research question couches this process in theoretical terms: **How does Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime shape the civic voice of ordinary end users on the platform?**

This chapter discusses relevant theories as a basis for constructing a conceptual framework that can underpin the empirical and analytical parts of this study. It begins by discussing and locating the thesis in a tradition of thinking about citizenship, which, as noted in Chapter 1, might be described as non-naturalist. To further develop this view, the Chapter proceeds in three steps. First, it builds the analytical foundation of the conceptual framework by revisiting key elements of social practices theory (structure, agency, power). Then, to lay the groundwork for a partial reconceptualization of citizenship as a practice, it engages critically with recognition theory. Thirdly, the chapter discusses critical approaches to datafication and visibility, establishing conceptual pieces that are instrumental in my definition of datafication power. These three parts operate more or less independently, and their interrelations are detailed in the conceptual framework. There, I define citizenship as the social practice of political self-representation (*civic voice*), Facebook's datafication power as being exerted through a form of structure (*algorithmic visibility regime*) and theorize how the latter concept is implicated in the shaping of the former. I propose that the datafication operations of this regime do not bear upon civic voices directly. Rather, they influence the construction (or *schematization*) of understandings (or *social imaginaries*) about themselves. In turn, these imaginaries work as the immediate structural elements informing whether and how end users try to control the visibility – and likely change the nature – of their civic voice expressions on Facebook, potentially leading to transformations in how they understand themselves as citizens, I suggest.

3.2. A Non-naturalist View of Citizenship

This first part of the chapter positions this thesis in relation to the broad field of studies of citizenship. The theoretical tradition upon which I draw to understand ordinary Brazilians' processes

of civic becoming encompasses approaches that have been described as "interpretive political science" (Bevir & Rhodes, 2016), "culturalist" (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 5; Couldry, Livingstone, & Markham, 2007, p. 11) and "critical citizenship studies" (Isin, 2008). While these labels suggest different disciplinary emphases (hermeneutics/phenomenology, cultural studies and strands of post-structuralism, respectively), this thesis follows Bevir and Blakely (2016, 2019) and uses the umbrella term *non-naturalist* to characterize their common assumptions. In what follows, I explore these assumptions, highlighting their usefulness and limitations in the context of the present research.

The non-naturalist tradition, as the name suggests, is defined in opposition to "naturalist" views. Thus, non-naturalists do *not* see citizenship as a phenomenon that is "ahistorical and invariant like those often found in the natural sciences" (Bevir & Blakely, 2016, p. 31), something that may be broken down into discrete pieces and analysed to find correlative or causal laws. This is because non-naturalists arguably *depart* from two naturalist models of the civic subject (the citizen): one, derived from "homo economicus", assumes these subjects are free beings who reason about themselves and their condition in a decontextualized and rational manner; the other, derived from "homo sociologicus", tends to see these subjects as subject, ultimately, to self-interpreting social rules (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 245). In contrast, non-naturalist views seem to operate on the premise that subjects are in tension between two opposing, but complementary forces: their meaning-making reflexivity and their social embeddedness, which render citizenship unstable, contextual and processual.

It is possible to discuss this tradition drawing on three core concepts. First, instead of emphasising membership, status and the legal institution of rights and obligations, as in the Marshallian mode of citizenship,[9] this tradition assigns a central role to actions (see Arendt, 1969, for a modern precursor). These actions have been described variously as "performances" (Zivi, 2012; Isin & Turner, 2002; Banaji, 2013), "acts" (Isin & Nielsen, 2008) or "civic practices" (Dahlgren, 2009; Highfield, 2016; Cammaerts, 2018; Matonni & Treré, 2014; Penney, 2017; Bakardjieva & Gaden, 2012; Chouliaraki, 2010).[10] These practices are deemed not to be limited to the institutional administration of a community (e.g. voting or policymaking), but to encompass verbal and non-verbal communication (e.g. talking, discussion, protest, organizing, deliberating) and knowledge acquisition (e.g. reading,

[9] See Isin and Turner (2007) for a discussion of why Marshall (1950) fails to explain current forms of multiple and globalized citizenships. This is not to say that citizenship does not encompasses national rights and legal membership.

[10] Isin (2008) differentiates between "acts" and "practices" on the assumption that the latter do not capture disruptive and unexpected actions. Practices, in this thesis, are not understood, necessarily, as a self-perpetuating "habitus" (see Section 3.3, and Schatzki, 2002).

watching, searching). Likewise, rather than being restricted to special moments of public life, they are seen as enmeshed in the everyday, "private quarters and daily dealings of individual persons" (Bakardjieva, 2009, p. 92, Mouffe, 2005; Eliasoph, 1998). In this view, an action can be defined as civic not only "when, regardless of status and substance, subjects constitute themselves as citizens – or… as those to whom the right to have rights is due" (Isin, 2008, p. 18) but also when this self-constitution involves the ineradicable possibility of dispute and conflict, that is, "the political" (Mouffe, 1992; 2005). The typical subjects of these practices are "citizens".[11]

These citizens might be seen as members of social movements and activists, whose political involvement takes place in the context of more or less stable political organizations, or simply as "ordinary people" – the sort of actor in which this thesis is interested. Carpentier (2011, pp. 181-183; see also Calhoun, 1992) argues that, despite a long tradition of seeing, in this expression, a form of discursive othering (Hartley, 1992; Williams, 1981; Hall, 1981), the idea of "ordinary" remains productively fluid. I suggest that there is no fixed or single definition of "ordinary" because there is no fixed or typical definition of "extraordinary". Even the most "ordinary" person potentially remains capable of "extraordinary" acts; likewise, it is hard to conceive of an "extraordinary" individual who does not experience much of her life "ordinarily". In dramatically lowering the costs of engaging in civic practices, digital technologies have rendered this difference even more unstable. Thanks to datafied platforms, actions that once were exclusive to "activists" are now easily accessible to ordinary people (Bennet & Segerberg, 2012). Nevertheless, some differentiation can be achieved. Section 4.4.2 shows that this study was inspired by the work of media and communication scholars, who tend to define "ordinary" individuals/end users as opposed to organized, professional, highly skilled and powerful individuals/end users (Couldry, 2002; Ytreberg, 2004; Syvertsen, 2001; Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, as cited by Carpentier, 2011, p. 182).

A second general concept that seems common to non-naturalist approaches is *cognitive-symbolic elements*.[12] A central feature of these elements is *civic identity*. In dialogue with theories about late modern selfhood (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2000) and self-performativity (Butler, 1990), non-naturalist accounts frequently define civic identity, not as a fixed pre-existing element, but as the unstable outcome of the meaning-making processes engendered by civic practices (Bakardjieva, 2009, p. 93). That is, engaging in civic practices is expected to prompt individuals to ponder not only on their rights and obligations as citizens, but who they *are* as citizens (Isin, 2017, p. 501). This reflexivity is

[11] Interestingly, the notion of "citizen" began to be associated with ordinary people only after the emergence of nation states (Bruce & Yearley, 2006, p. 32).
[12] I borrow this term from Reckwitz's (2002, p. 546) discussion of social practices.

said to culminate in two basic meanings that "operate in tandem": the sense of being an "empowered political citizen" and the "feeling of a 'we' group, clearly defined in relation to a 'they'" (Dahlgren, 2009, pp. 120-121).

Another cognitive-symbolic element said to be essential to the practice of citizenship is *ethical values*. Overall, the normative background to non-naturalist views of citizenship is located within what democratic theory usually terms "republicanism" (Dryzek, Honig, & Phillips, 2006, p. 20) and, in particular, "participatory democracy" (Della Porta, 2013, p. 38). A "participatory" understanding of answers (at least normatively) the "democratic paradox" (Mouffe, 2000) mentioned in Section 1.1, by positing that participation, "at all levels, institutional or not", is normatively desirable to the extent that it can be "oriented to *rebalancing power inequalities* [emphasis added]" (Della Porta, 2013, p. 38). This concern with participation triggers concern about civic *dis*engagement, which is associated to the erosion "of engagement at the subjective level", a sentiment suggesting that citizens' practices "are losing political impact" (Dahlgren, 2014, p. 3). However, beyond the idea that participation is normatively desirable, it is not always clear which ethical values should guide citizenship. For some, these values can be summarized as "universal liberty and equality" (Mouffe, 1992, p. 30); others divide them into "substantive" (equality, liberty, justice, solidarity, tolerance) and "procedural" (openness, reciprocity, discussion and responsibility) (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 111).

A third cognitive-symbolic element considered necessary for the practice of citizenship is accurate *knowledge* about public matters – and citizens' abilities to acquire such knowledge, which involves discussion of literacy (e.g. Agre, 2004; Dahlgren, 2009, p. 109). Non-naturalists tend to assume that reflexivity turns the consumption of information into a relatively open meaning-making process, shaped by individual identity, values and *emotions*, this last also a key cognitive-symbolic element of citizenship.[13] Against most deliberative models of participation, non-naturalists often understand that disentangling emotion from reason is artificial and detrimental to an understanding of democracy (Di Gregorio & Merolli, 2016; Mihai, 2014; see Scarantino & de Sousa, 2018, for a definition of emotions).

A specific understanding of *power* is the third main concept in non-naturalist conceptions of citizenship. The individual who becomes a citizen by "doing" citizenship is commonly seen as both a subject *to* power, since she must obey some rules to have any rights, and a subject *of* power, once

[13] Sometimes termed "passions", "sentiments", "affects". In this thesis, I use "emotion" to refer to all these feelings.

these rights allow her to subvert the obligations to which she initially submitted (Isin & Ruppert, 2015, p. 31, based on Foucault, 1984; cf. Brown, 2015). In addition to rights/obligations and economic rationality, space, also, is considered a crucial site of power. If no attention is given to understanding how power relations constitute these spaces by including/excluding certain civic practices, it is argued, theorizations of a democracy risk perpetuating the inequalities they may seek to combat – as contended by critics of the early Habermasian public sphere theory (for a summary, see Dahlberg, 2013). Debates on power and digital spaces are important junctures where non-naturalist authors tend to approach online media. Before the emergence of datafied platforms, these spaces, generally, were seen as relatively decentralized, enabling individuals to more easily acquire civic knowledge, engage in civic practices and, thus, challenge and circumvent top-down control (Dahlgren, 2009).

More recently, there has been a turn towards consideration of datafied platforms – usually focussed on social movements. Some argue that they enable generative computational openings and closures in relation to which citizens are constituted (Isin & Ruppert, 2015). Others suggest that their material affordances might be decoded by activists and, in this way, shape their self-mediation practices and collective identities (Cammaerts, 2018). There has been renewed interest, also, in how tech-savvy actors, such as "hackers", "data activists" and "civic tech entrepreneurs", employ their computational skills for political ends, sometimes "hacking in the public interest", as Alison Powell (2016) puts it (see also Kennedy, 2018; Pybus, Coté, & Blanke, 2015; Baack, 2015; Milan & Gutiérrez, 2015).

Writing about "political agency", Stephania Milan (2018) argues that datafied platforms are associated to an "unprecedented… *quest for visibility*" amongst "activists", creating "subjectivities that orient *themselves toward the algorithm* — in other words, end users are trained to think of themselves with (what they believe is) the logic of the subtending algorithms [emphasis added]" (Milan, 2018, p. 514; see also Tufecki, 2013; Bigo, Isin, & Ruppert, 2017). Milan suggests that this orientation may limit citizens' practices to the "ability to reveal oneself to the most marketable' and likeable elements, an "optimal" self that is manufactured to increase popularity and "self-esteem" but that also often produces misleading perceptions of a social movement's strength (Milan, 2018, p. 513). This "politics of visibility", she argues, exacerbates "the centrality of the subjective and private experience of the individual" and undermines "fundamental group dynamics such as internal solidarity, commitment and responsibility towards fellow activists" (Milan, 2015, p. 896). On the other hand, the possibility of state surveillance has been found to produce "chilling effects" or resignation in activists, who have often naturalized the idea that their communications are monitored (Dencik &

Cable, 2017; Hintz & Milan, 2018; Stoycheff, 2016). Others have collected quantitative evidence of how end users' incapacity to control one's privacy seems to engender "spirals of silence" (Kwon, Moon, & Stefanone, 2014; Fox & Holt, 2018). In his study of current social movements, Emiliano Treré (2019, p. 198; see also Barassi, 2015; Lehtiniemi & Ruckenstein, 2019) suggests that many of these actions and inactions are informed by certain "technopolitical imaginaries" about how platform's "algorithms" work. His fieldwork revealed that these activists tend to actualize these understandings as forms of control (including a sense of "paranoia") and "political power" ("hacking" the system in their favour).[14]

This thesis takes the empirical findings and conceptual insights of this tradition as its point of departure. In taking a holistic view of the interconnectedness between subjective and societal processes, non-naturalist accounts offer a complex, but realistic view of how ordinary people become citizens by doing citizenship. Furthermore, the suggestions about the consequences of datafication offer inspiration and intriguing points of comparison for my own research.

Yet, further conceptual clarifications are necessary. First, there is a need for a better understanding of the very concept of citizenship as a practice. Normatively, it is not necessarily clear from the works examined above, what qualifies as ethical citizenship, that is, what democratic citizenship ought to be beyond the mere prescription of participation. Many non-naturalist authors say, or seem to presume, that ethical values should suffice to achieve this differentiation. However, it is not clear which ethical value is that. Similarly, it is not entirely clear *how* citizens come into being. What is the relation of this civic becoming to civic practices? The processes that allow them to reconfigure how they understand themselves as citizens are not usually detailed in this literature. To address these issues, the present chapter foregrounds a concept that is strongly implied, but essentially backgrounded in much of the non-naturalist writings: recognition. Arguments about the importance of actualizing and claiming rights, of "empowering" citizens and constructing collective affinities, can be traced back to older debates over whether and how citizens' voices are or are not heard. On the one hand, since recognition theory is linked, inherently, to modern ideals of democracy (as I will show), it offers a particularly suitable normative backbone for conceptualizing citizenship – and a standpoint from which to consider authoritarianism. On the other, the proposal that citizens are formed through intersubjective relationships helps to offer a more sophisticated definition of how, ultimately, processes of civic becoming unfold. My discussion of recognition theory, in Section 3.4,

[14] Citizenship is not the only perspective from which the relationship between datafication and democracy has been analysed. I return to this issue in Section 3.5.1.

informs, in the conceptual framework, the conceptualization of *civic voice* – which is how this thesis defines citizenship as a practice.

Second, despite the recent works on datafied platforms and social movements, and their original insights, there is a need for a theoretical systematization of the ways in which datafied spaces engender power relations – and, as such, shape processes of civic becoming. This applies particularly to the civic practices of ordinary individuals (the actors this thesis is interested in), who are likely to be less organized than activists and do not necessarily involve an explicit articulation of a collective identity. Thus, it is unclear to what extent the aforementioned findings and insights regarding attempts by activists to become more or less visible can explain similar experiences and practices of these ordinary individuals. My conceptualization of datafication power begins in Section 3.5, where I discuss critical data studies, and is finalized in the conceptual framework (3.6), where I define Facebook's datafication power as exerted through an *algorithmic visibility regime*.

These conceptualizations require, first, the construction of an analytical foundation, I suggest. I resorted to a body of work that is rather familiar to non-naturalists. When scholars in this tradition invoke a holistic vision of actions, cognitive-symbolic elements and power, their theoretical basis tends to be located in *social practices theory* and, in particular, in its critical variations (see Isin & Nielsen, 2008). The next part of the chapter revisits some of the fundamentals of this scholarship.

3.3. Overview of Social Practices Theory

The following sections discuss three concepts that are crucial for this thesis: structure (Section 3.3.1), agency (Section 3.3.2) and power (Section 3.3.3). Instead of choosing one major theorist, I explore multiple perspectives and demonstrate how they complement each other. This approach provides me with a rather detailed analytical tool kit which, in the conceptual framework (Section 3.6), is combined with other notions to develop the ideas of *civic voice* and *algorithmic visibility regime*, and to theorize their relationship.

The emergence, in the second half of the 20th century, of social practice as one of the linchpins of social theory, was largely a response to the Wittgensteinian challenge to the assumption that rules determine actions. The concept was developed to investigate the locus of the "*background understanding*… that makes it possible to follow rules, obey norms, and articulate and grasp meanings" (Rouse, 2007, p. 503 ; Ortner, 1984; Schatzki, 1996). From a social practices theory perspective, actions do not merely follow rules – they also constitute them. This insight inspired

theorists to question the conventional agency versus structure dichotomy and opened new avenues to study power generally, (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984; Foucault, 1984). Various disciplines took up this challenge, including media and communications (e.g. Steele & Brown, 1995; Couldry, 2004; Postill, 2010).

If it is accepted that practices are *processes* involving both bundles of bodily actions and cognitive-symbolic elements – and, therefore, cannot be reduced only to either (Schatzki, 1996) – there is a fundamental bifurcation with regard to how practices are reproduced. This bifurcation is reminiscent of two different responses to the Wittgensteinian challenge. According to the first tradition, "the connections that form our background [are] just de facto links, not susceptible of any justification… simply imposed by our society", and are thus highly stable, reproduced automatically and impervious to resistance. In contrast, a second tradition, "takes the background as incorporating understanding … a grasp on things which although quite inarticulate may *allow us to formulate reasons and explanations when challenged* [emphasis added]" (Taylor, 1995, pp. 167-68). The second tradition suggests that the rules embodied in practices have "to be applied", an exercise that "may involve difficult and finely tuned judgments" (Taylor, 1995, p. 177). This renders the adherence to rules open to creative reconstructions by "self-interpreting" individuals (Taylor, 1985, pp. 26-27), who are, thus, less stable than assumed in the first definition (Schatzki, 2002).

Given my adoption of a non-naturalist perspective, which assumes that individuals are inherently marked by reflexivity, the theoretical framing developed here accords with the second tradition. This initial choice substantively reduces the number of approaches on which the thesis can draw. These approaches tend to focus on three main concepts to explain the constitution of social practices: structure (including the aforementioned "background understanding" and materiality), agency (to specify how interpretation informs action) and power (to account for the unequal disputes that shape the nexus of structure and agency). I unpack these concepts in what follows.

3.3.1. Structure: Resources, Schemas and Social Imaginaries

In this thesis, I adopt Sewell's (1992) synoptic formulation of structure. He examines critical theories of practices, identifies their difficulties and proposes a definition that is unusual in two respects: it exhibits striking terminological clarity and expounds, in sufficient detail for my purposes, the role of materiality.

Sewell's starting point is to argue that, while social practices theorists (in particular Giddens and Bourdieu) are correct in not assigning deterministic capacities to "structures", they are unable to explain, ultimately, what "structure" means beyond being a metaphor for other equally vague terms, such as "patterning" and "stability". Sewell sets out to provide a formulation, which, in addition to recognizing the agency of actors and "the possibility of change", is able to bridge two visions of structure: the semiotic (which tends to define structure as related to meaning and meaning production) and the material (which tends to define structure as related to non-human materials) (Sewell, 1992, p. 4).

Using the springboard of Gidden's structuration theory, Sewell begins by discussing the first vision, according to which structures are virtual rules, that is, generalizable procedures that pattern actions. This semiotic conceptualization is promising, but must be made more specific in Sewell's view. In place of "rules", he prefers *schema*, the normative "conventions, recipes, scenarios, principles of action, and habits" (Sewell, 1992, p. 8). Sewell contends that schemas have varied "depths". Some are "deep", that is, pervasive and "relatively unconscious", the "taken-for-granted mental assumptions or modes of procedure that actors normally apply without being aware that they are applying them". A "deep" schema "lies beneath and generates a certain range" of "surface' schemas (Sewell, 1992, p. 22).

Aside from schemas, structures can be conceptualized, also, as *resources*. Resources might be divided between human (e.g. one's actions, skills, knowledge and dispositions) and nonhuman (e.g. "objects, animate or inanimate, naturally occurring or manufactured") (Sewell, 1992, p. 9). Sewell differs from Giddens in proposing that resources are not "virtual", but actual. This is so, he argues, because they are either physical things (in the case of non-human resources) or "observable characteristics of real people", in the case of human resources (Sewell, 1992, p. 10). Some structures are understood to "mobilize" more or fewer resources and to create varying concentrations of different kinds (persuasion or coercion) of "power" for certain actors to advance their interests.

Sewell posits that structures could be seen as emerging out of constitutive relations between these two elements: "schemas are the effects of resources, just as resources are the effects of schemas… " (Sewell, 1992, p. 13). On the one hand, schemas effectuate human resources inasmuch as they engender understandings about what is possible for particular social actors. However, they also effectuate non-human resources – both by assigning to things the very meaning of "resources" and by orienting their usage, that is, how they should be exploited, manipulated, etc. On the other

hand, resources effectuate schemas when they "incorporate and actualize", "teach and validate" schemas, which then can "be inferred" from "material form" (in the case of non-human resources) or from their observable enactment by people (in the case of human resources) (Sewell, 1992, p. 13). How schemas can be "inferred" from non-human resources is an important, but underdeveloped point, to which I return when discussing agency in the next section.

While Sewell (1992, p. 22) suggests that typologies of structures are difficult to define *a priori*, there is, arguably, at least one *kind* of schema that is necessarily present in social life – namely, imaginaries. The term has been conceptualized variously as relating to e.g. psychoanalysis (Lacan, 2006), communities (Anderson, 1991), "arational" concepts of the social (Castoriadis, 1987/1997) and "global flows" (Appadurai, 1996). However, the theory that, perhaps, is best aligned to the general notion of social practices that underpins this chapter, is Charles Taylor's (2004). Taylor's approach is chiefly historical. He is interested, principally, in the emergence of a modern, secular imaginary in the Western world – but his understanding of imaginaries is helpful beyond this context, as suggested by e.g. Mansell (2012), Jasanoff (2015), Barassi (2015), and Treré (2019) (see also McNeil, Arribas-Ayllon, Haran, Mackenzie, & Tutton, 2017). By social imaginary Taylor means, "the taken-for-granted shape of things, too obvious to mention" (Taylor, 2004, p. 29), that is, how people "imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (Taylor, 2004, p. 23).

Given their pervasiveness and implicitness, social imaginaries, are arguably akin to the prototypical "deep schema" to which Sewell refers. As such, they are neither illusory (as the ordinary understanding of the term would have it) nor are they fabrications that perpetuate domination (as in Marxist understanding of "ideology" – see Thompson, 1982). Rather, social imaginaries are depicted as constitutive of and constituted by the social practices they apparently represent in dematerialized form, and are carried in the "images, stories, and legends" of a society (Taylor, 2004, p. 23). Like Sewell, Taylor assumes that any attempt to pit "idealism" against "materialism" is based on a "false dichotomy" (2004, p. 31). By materialism he appears to mean less concrete things than human resources, the "material practices carried out by human beings in space and time" which are "inseparable" from the imaginary "modes of understanding" (or schemas) that enable those practices (Taylor, 2004, p. 31). Social imaginaries derive their constitutive capacity as much from their pervasiveness and implicitness as from their dual nature. On the one hand, they imply an understanding of existing practices as if they were natural, providing us with a sense of coherence

(Taylor, 2004, p. 31). On the other, this descriptive dimension has profound normative ramifications. Because, in accepting that this is the natural, "too obvious to mention" way of 'how things go', it can be assumed that this is "how they *ought to* go [emphasis added]" (Taylor, 2004, p. 31). Therefore, while not an ideology, social imaginaries are imbricated with power: the social practices to which these schemas give coherence are, themselves, dynamically associated with an unequal material reality.

There is a second aspect which clarifies the constitutive properties of social imaginaries in relation to practices. As a "deep structure", these imaginaries, also, are associated to the constitution of other, more superficial and localized schemas – arguably the "surface schemas" Sewell theorizes. Taylor seems to point precisely to this when he says that social imaginaries are not a mere "grasp on the norms underlying our social practice", but a broader moral order that "makes these norms realizable" (Taylor, 2004, p. 40; 1995, p. 170). These "norms" do not exist as detached theory. They are materialized in people's everyday lives through their comprehension of their *own position* in that broader normative order, which Taylor terms the "self-understanding" that "build[s] upon implicit understandings that underlie and make possible common practices" (Gaonkar, 2002, p. 4).[15] Such sense of the self is subjective – produced by cognitive processes that can only be felt and reported by the individuals themselves. Furthermore, inasmuch as the social imaginary is associated with "how one should live" (Williams, 1985/2006, p. 1), this sense is necessarily ethical. As suggested by Taylor's (1989, p. 64) earlier work on the origins of modern identity, one comes to understand who one is by making decisions about how to act, vis-à-vis what Taylor describes as "hypergoods", and then questioning and interpreting these decisions. He suggests that, to know "who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary" (Taylor, 1989, p. 28). Again, individual normative orientations are seen as anchored in a sense of naturalness about one's social life – "whom to speak to and when and how… what kinds of people we can associate with in what ways and in what circumstances" (Taylor, 2004, p. 26). Lastly, this sense is also social. Self-understandings can only be constructed by our positioning ourselves "in a certain way among other humans" (Taylor, 2004, p. 65).

[15] While the concept of social imaginary may be studied in relation to collective processes, I focus here, mostly, on the experiences of individuals.

3.3.2. Agency: Three Meaning-Making Processes

The formulation of agency adopted here is based on Emirbayer and Mische (1998). Similarly to Sewell, they review existing theories to offer a clear and synthetic formulation. But they complement his view by breaking down agency into multiple meaning-making processes (see Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 1005) and characterizing it as the "[t]he temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments… which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 970). My use of their theory is selective. I focus on the three macro-elements of agency to which their definition points and on some of their main sub-elements.[16]

The first macro-element (iterational) refers to the "*schematization* of social experience [emphasis added]" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 975). Their formulation seems to be designed, primarily, to explain routinized actions. However, I suggest it is useful for this study inasmuch as it helps to explain how people construct schemas – such as social imaginaries. Schutz's social phenomenology (1964, p. 283), on which Emirbayer and Mische draw heavily, posits that schemas are "constituted in and by previous experiencing activities of our consciousness". That is, they involve everyday experiences, reflected upon by individuals both socially and personally. Schematization occurs when individuals pay "selective attention" to certain "areas" of reality (Schutz, 1964, p. 283; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 979). Which areas of reality actors pay attention to in order to construct schemas about the world is rarely self-evident – they may encompass social experiences, artefacts, people's own thoughts. In general, individuals are oriented by "systems of relevancies", which are formed "over the course of biographical histories" and through social experience (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 979). These systems influence "not only what is problematic and what can remain unquestioned but also what has to be known and with what degree of clarity and precision it has to be known in order to solve the emergent problem" (Schutz, 1964, pp. 283-284).

If selective attention seems common to all forms of schematization, more specific processes also can occur. One of these is "type recognition"(Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 979). "Types" are "simplifying models" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 979) which are formed either when an "emerging experience" is understood as "familiar" or when such "experience" is comprehended as "strange" (Schutz, 1964, p. 284). Therefore, the processes of recognizing "types" (or "patterns") depend on comparisons between "an emerging experience with those of the past, either within the actor's direct

[16] I leave aside the elements of their theory which, in my view, are not helpful to explain processes of civic becoming on Facebook. Moreover, I do not engage in this study with their formulation of temporality.

memory or within a social memory as objectified in various *media of communication* [emphasis added]" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 979). Importantly, schematizations are framed by the "ontological structures" of the "objective world" (Schutz, 1964, p. 288; see also Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

The second macro element of agency is projectivity. It "encompasses the imaginative generation of possible future trajectories of action" in which schemas "may be creatively reconfigured" in relation to individuals' teleological emotions, their "hopes, fears, and desires" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 984). Emirbayer and Mische propose that the generation of a plan begins with *anticipatory identification*, where the individual considers the schemas already held "to clarify motives, goals, and intentions" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 989). In a second moment (*symbolic recomposition*), individuals "insert themselves into a variety of possible trajectories and spin out alternative means-ends sequences", likely taking into account the expected reactions of others (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 990). After such exploration, the individual is said to entertain "hypothetical resolutions" to the likely competing or contradictory future scenarios, resolutions that might have to resolve "several conflicts simultaneously" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 990). This other sub-element alludes to the justification of a possible course of action.

Yet, projectivity does not determine actions. Individuals might identify ambiguities in their plans, triggering yet another layer of reflection on "emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations", prompting adaptations to people's goals and plans (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 971). Emirbayer and Mische name this third macro-element of agency *practical evaluation.* A sub-element of this third macro element of agency is *problematization*, the recognition that the reality is, "in some degree resistant" to the "immediate and effortless realization" of a plan and that something must be done to render the situation "unproblematic" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 998). Deciding how to adapt a plan to these difficulties might entail some form of *deliberation*. That is, after problematizing and characterizing a given situation, people commonly engage in "a conscious searching consideration of how best to respond to situational contingencies" in light of plans (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 999). Deliberation might be intersubjective and public or monologic and private, a dialogue with oneself. In engaging in this sort of thinking, people might reconsider their own habits and plans, their fairness and usefulness, leading to a decision about what to do. Quoting Nussbaum (1986, p. 307-8), Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p. 999) argue that these judgments stand "on the borderline between the intellectual and the passional, partaking of both natures: it can be described as either desiderative deliberation or deliberative desire". Finally, there is the *execution* of

the decision, which might demand certain abilities and entail sacrifices and unintentional consequences that nuance even carefully considered plans (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 1000).

While *projectivity* and *practical evaluation* refer to different moments of agency, the level of detail needed in this thesis allows me to adopt the general term *project* to encompass these two dimensions.

3.3.3. Power: Prefiguration and Its Ordering

Defined in this way, agency and structure do not have *a priori* normative characteristics nor are they opposed in a zero-sum game. Their relationship is one of co-constitution, patterned by disputes between unequal actors, who, frequently, try to influence the unfurling of this process to the benefit of their own projects, social imaginaries and self-understandings. This asymmetric patterning has been discussed through the notion of power.

This thesis adopts a qualified version of the conceptualization developed by the late Michel Foucault, as hinted at in Section 3.2. While Foucault's approaches to power varied over time (see Foucault, 2002, p. 331; Oksala, 2013), in the last part of his life he turned away from the earlier focus on top-down disciplinary institutions and became concerned with the self-interpretive processes whereby individuals turn *themselves* into "subjects" endowed with a self-understanding (Laidlaw, 2014; Ortner, 2016). In his view, these processes of subjectivation occur through social practices of self-government that respond (transform, resist, comply) to a normative "field of possibilities" engendered by structures of government, such as scientific classification (Foucault, 2002, p. 341; Foucault, 1988). He suggested that self-formation of the subject is inherently indeterminate, susceptible to myriad "ways to conduct oneself" (Foucault, 1984, p. 26; Foucault, 2002, p. 331). In sum, contemporary techniques of power (which he sometimes labelled "governmentality") are defined as not ontologically opposed to freedom, largely independent of discrete and observable controllers and often producing unintended consequences (Brown, 2006, p. 73).

The political thinking of the *late* Foucault (which is philosophically coherent with my discussion of structure and agency) has inspired multiple applications. Building on the vocabulary developed in the previous two sections and on an insight from social practices theorist Theodore Schatzki (2002), I propose that the notion of *prefiguration* is helpful to understand which angle of Foucault's formulation of power is of interest here. My starting point is one of the ambiguities in his theory. For Foucault, as indicated above, power occurs through government of the said "field" of

possible actions. At the same time, he says, also, that this field only "in the extreme… constrains or forbids absolutely"; more often it "incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; it releases or contrives, makes more probable or less" (Foucault, 2002, p. 341). Thus, rendering some actions possible or impossible (the absolute constraints he refers to) rarely impacts on how people act to change themselves; usually, control is exerted by assigning other *particular meanings* to particular courses of action, making them look like, for example, inciting, seductive, easier or harder, probable or unlikely, etc. This indicates a contradiction that Foucault left underdeveloped, as Schatzki (2002) points out. It suggests that government and self-government interact in terms that are much more precise than the notion of "field of possibilities" entails. Schatzki (2002, pp. 227-28) proposes the concept of "relations of prefiguration" to understand this interaction. He defines these relations as the means whereby "social life bears on forthcoming activity by qualifying paths of action as easier or harder, longer or shorter, obligatory or proscribed" (Schatzki, 2002, p. 227).

In this formulation, prefiguration is unavoidable: all actions depend on being endowed with some form of meaning – as fleeting or inarticulate as this meaning might be. However, prefiguration is also influenced pervasively by attempts at ordering, Schatzki (2002) says. That is, some actors constantly try to lead other actors to qualify certain "paths of actions" in particular ways so as to prompt these people to carry out/do not carry out certain actions. In Sewell's (1992) terms, these power exertions are realized through human resources (e.g. discourse, actions) and non-human resources (e.g. physical and digital artefacts, such as the datafication operations of Facebook I am concerned with in this thesis). I shall focus on the latter.

Under this perspective, no artefact *directly* produces meanings about actions. In order to lead certain people to qualify certain paths of action in certain ways, these resources, first, must try to shape how they are themselves understood by those they are designed to influence. Or, to use the vocabulary of Emirbayer and Mische (1998) described in the previous section, they must try to influence how they are schematized. This attempt is realized, importantly, through the material shaping of these resources, i.e. their materialization (for similar propositions, see e.g. Verbeek, 2011; Bijker & Law, 1992, p. 300).[17] By materiality, I mean the matter and the forms "that do not change, *by*

[17] The idea that artefacts influence on actions resembles the notion of affordances, developed chiefly by Gibson (1966) and frequently used or referred to by authors interested in the relation between media and civic practices (e.g. Cammaerts, 2018; Milan, 2018). Affordances can be defined as "'multifaceted relational structure'… between an object/technology and the end user that enables or constrains potential behavioural outcomes in a particular context" (Evans, Pearce, Vitak, & Treem, 2017). I contend that prefiguration and affordances differ, to the extent that the latter involve *actions* that are enabled/constrained by things, thus, resembling the possible/impossible dichotomy of the "field of possibilities". The former refers to the *meanings* that designers may try to assign to certain actions through the characteristics of the artefacts they construct.

themselves, across differences in time and context [emphasis added]" (Leonardi, 2012, p. 31). This entails that the materialization of an artefact might be interpreted differently by different actors.

As defined here, the notion of prefiguration hones the constitutive relationship between artefacts and schemas that Sewell conceptualizes (see Section 3.3.1 above) by making clear its political dimension. However, even if non-human resources are schematized as their designers expect and lead to the intended assignment of certain meanings to certain actions (both of which are far from sure), actors might decide not to realize such actions. As Schatzki (2002, p. 256) puts it, "all the prefiguration in the world cannot sew up" action before action occurs. From a late-Foucauldian perspective, the process remains uncertain – and thus productive.

As form of power, prefiguration may be defined as the (1) materialization of certain non-human resources (artefacts) with the goal of influencing their schematization, so as to (2) engender particular understandings about these artefacts in order to (3) lead individuals to qualify certain actions (likely toward the artefact itself) in certain ways. This insight is what allows me to theorize, in the conceptual framework, Facebook's power as working indirectly (see Section 3.6.2 below).

3.4. Overview of Recognition Theory

The previous sections defined the three core components of social practices theory that serve as the analytical bedrock upon which the remainder of this chapter builds. As described in Section 3.2, however, a reconceptualization of citizenship demands, also, a theory able to explain how democratic citizens come (and *ought to* come) into being. This is done in the next set of sections through a consideration of recognition theory.

The re-emergence in the post-Cold War period of "recognition", as a prominent concept to address social justice, has been linked to the increased awareness of non-economic forms of injustice, the rapid intensification of globalization and the spread of the liberal democratic ideal (Markell, 2003, p. 19). It is possible to trace theories about recognition back to Plato's "Republic" (Fukuyama, 2018, pp. 47-60). However, usually, Hegel is the most important source of inspiration of current theorizations. Hegel's "big idea" of recognition is supported by "two features": one, that self-understandings are "essentially… a *social* achievement", dependent on one's intersubjective engagement with others, but realized by individual's own conscience; two, that "recognition is a *normative* attitude", for "to recognize someone is to take her to be the subject of normative statuses,

that is, of commitments and entitlements, as capable of undertaking responsibilities and exercising authority [original emphasis]" – i.e. be autonomous (Brandom, 2007, p. 136).

Building on these points, contemporary authors have reconstructed the notion of recognition. While many others have also worked on the theme (e.g. Taylor, 1994; Fraser, 2003; Ricoeur, 2005; Markell, 2003; Young, 1990), the work of Axel Honneth offers a particularly helpful way, albeit in modified form, of considering the dimensions of recognition which are important in this study.[18]

3.4.1. Social Recognition, Voice and Social Freedom

Reading Hegel through a neo-Aristotelian lenses, Honneth identifies three different "patterns" of recognition and misrecognition, or ways that different, but interdependent sorts of relations between persons can give rise to three practical "relations-to-self". Since these relations come to define who one is and who one might possibly wish to be and want to do, they are the processes that fundamentally are responsible for autonomy. That is, Honneth does not define what constitutes an autonomous action, but rather what ought to be in place for an autonomous individual to flourish.

The term "interdependent" suggests a developmental way of understanding the proper constitution of the self, in which one step makes the next more likely. The *first pattern* involves the affective relationship between an infant and its main carer and, over time, between the individual and other family members, friends and romantic partners. Through *love*, individuals are expected to develop a relation-to-self that allows for "the development of all further attitudes of self-respect" (Honneth, 1992, p. 107). The "most fundamental" form of misrecognition at this level is "violation of the body", such as torture and rape (Honneth, 1992, p. 132). The *second pattern* echoes the Marshallian view of citizenship (Honneth, 1992, pp. 115-117). Honneth posits that recognition is produced through a legal relationship with the state (*rights*), which is made possible by general acceptance of an equalitarian moral status of all individuals in the condition of social beings. Being subject to rights and obligations infuses the individual with a basic sense of "self-respect" – a second kind of "relation-to-self". Misrecognition, in this case, means denial of rights.

However, legal rights in themselves do not explain how they are fought for, claimed, realized, contested, changed, imposed or invented; nor do they clarify the practices, which, while entirely about

[18] For critical assessments of the importance of Honneth's theory, see McQueen, 2014; McBride, 2013; Zurn, 2015.

governing the polity, do not explicitly address the existence, institution or content of rights. These practices – the focus in this thesis – are explained primarily by the *third pattern*, *social recognition*. Social recognition is mediated by a shared set of norms, which orient the appraisal of "achievements" and the "social worth" of "particular personality features" by calculating "the degree to which these [features] appear able to contribute to the realization of societal goals" (Honneth, 1992, p. 122). Different traits and abilities allow individuals to contribute differently to a polity's "shared praxis" (Honneth, 1992, p. 129). This sort of recognition instils in the individual a third form of "relation-to-self" that Honneth terms "self-esteem". The shared norms on which it is based are understood as historically specific. If, in traditional societies, esteem stemmed from the individual's social origins, in modern societies, achievement has become individualized, oriented "towards the capacities developed by the individual in the course of his or her life", which inject "value pluralism", "albeit one defined in class-specific and gender-specific terms", into the framework within which social worth is formulated (Honneth, 1992, p. 125). The tension between the need to establish general "societal goals" and the expectation of value plurality renders the granting of social esteem a permanent source of dispute. Social *mis*recognition or *denigration* occur within a recognition framework in which the individual's contributions to a community "is so constituted as to downgrade individual forms of life and manners of belief as inferior or deficient", robbing "the subjects in question of *every opportunity* to attribute social value to their own abilities [emphasis added]" (Honneth, 1992, p. 134).

As a consequence, individuals or groups might see themselves as unable, effectively, to contribute to the social world of which they are a part and this could trigger a "struggle for recognition", in which social actors try not only to be recognized but also to alter the very norms that underpin the granting of social recognition (Honneth, 1992, p. 143). This triggering mechanism comprises, first, "[n]egative emotional reactions, such as being ashamed or enraged, feeling hurt or indignant", which arise from the frustrated expectation of being respected (Honneth, 1992, p. 136), and, second, the articulation of these "symptoms" "within an intersubjective framework of interpretation such that they can be shown to be typical of an entire group" (Honneth, 1992, p. 163). However, this articulation remains only a possibility. For Honneth, relations of power both include or exclude some individuals from achieving autonomy *and* imply an understanding of whether psychological suffering is or is not "social" and, thus, is justification to resist and seek social change – "struggle". Defined in this way, social recognition occupies a significant position in the constitution of /citizens and polities. The former are emotionally driven[19] to try to have their individuality recognized

[19] Recognition is not an emotion, but its granting and denial are associated to an array of emotional states – pride, outrage, happiness, shame, etc. (see Zurn, 2015, p. 15).

by peers and avoid misrecognition; the latter are formed, crucially, by struggles over its symbolic hierarchies, Honneth says.

I suggest that the action through which social recognition is sought and struggled for is well captured by the metaphor of *voice* which seeks (and, under certain conditions, ought) to be *heard.* While the voice terminology is typical of multiple theoretical strands (e.g. Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Sen, 1999; Hirschman, 1970; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), and appears, also, in Honneth's work (e.g. Honneth, 2014, p. 15), my approach is inspired by Nick Couldry's (2010, p. vi) extensive work on it (cf. Butler, 2005). For Couldry, voice is akin to a social practice, the "socially grounded" process of "giving an account of oneself and what affects one's life" (Couldry, 2010, p. vi). This does not mean that one's voice is explicitly about oneself. More often, it is what a social actor thinks best represents her understanding about a given aspect – an expression of self-representation, I suggest. Of course, when expressing "voice", the individual might consider this voice "authentic" – the "real self". However, by exerting voice, we do not simply disclose our "inner" selves, Couldry reminds us. Rather, we reflect on such disclosure in order to assess who we are and who we want to be. There is an "internal plurality", made apparent through "the processes whereby we think about what one strand of our lives means for other strands" (Couldry, 2010, p. 46).[20] In this view, voice entails a relative uniqueness, but does not assume a unified, pre-existing and fixed self-understanding.

Let me return to Honneth. The normative kernel of his conceptualization rests in the notion of mutual recognition. Honneth (2014) argues that only institutionalized relations of mutual recognition can create the sustained conditions required for what he terms "democratic ethical life" (Honneth, 2014, p. 63). The first key idea of this proposition is that, in contrast to negative and reflexive conceptions, freedom is conceived as *social freedom*, created by the capacity of "being 'with oneself in the other'" and to "grasp each other as the other of their own selves" (Honneth, 2014, p. 44). If an individual needs some other person to be able to understand herself as an autonomous being, this other must be conceived of by her as worthy of respect, that is, as striving for the same thing – otherwise, recognition of the other is not itself worthy of respect and, thus, not sufficient to instil in her the confidence, respect and esteem to allow her to conceive herself as autonomous. The second idea is that "institutions of recognition" (Honneth, 2014, p. 46) must be designed to foster the universalization of the fundamental sense of reciprocity that underpins mutual recognition, chiefly

[20] I suggest that the means whereby self-representation is conveyed might include non-narrative actions, such as voting, marching, etc.

through “practices, customs and social roles” – and not, as Hegel assumed, only laws (Honneth, 2014, p. 66).

Honneth points out that democratic ethical life can be fulfilled only “where the principles of freedom institutionalized in the various spheres of action have been realized and embodied in corresponding practices and habits” (Honneth, 2014, p. 330). Put another way, as long as mutual recognition is not systematically ensured in personal and market relationships, democratic will formation can hardly function properly or, on its own, bring about the ethical life Honneth idealizes. I suggest, therefore, that “democratic ethical life” is not an institutional ideal of what democracy should be – it is a normative formulation of what democratic *culture* should be. Indeed, Honneth (2014, p. 329-335) uses the term “political culture” without defining it. Yet, if, for him, “democracy” is materialized in the dynamic, fragmented and mundane intersection of various institutions and ordinary practices, it might be understood as a form of culture (for a similar formulation, see Sewell, 2005, p. 169).

3.4.2. Power, Misrecognition and Authoritarianism

While understanding the struggle for social recognition as “agonistic” and its necessity as “permanent” (1992, p. 127), Honneth has been criticized for underestimating the role of power relations in recognition processes. This section presents three facets of these critiques and contends that, in contrast to what his most stringent critics say,[21] these problems do not necessarily undermine his theory. Instead, they help to improve it by rendering more sophisticated the understanding of what counts as misrecognition, and one of its key instantiations – authoritarianism.[22]

Firstly, an important criticism is that misrecognition may masquerade as social recognition. In this case, apparent acts of recognition might endow misrecognized citizens with a sense of belonging to an unjust order, so as to constitute subjects who willingly participate in the reproduction of their own unfreedom (McQueen, 2015; McNay, 2008; see also Althusser, 1971; Butler, 1988; Fanon, 1952, for previous articulations of this point). Over time, Honneth came to acknowledge that recognition could, indeed, function as a form of ideology, and that a more critical view of power was needed (Honneth, 2007, p. 339). I suggest that his recent elaboration of how social justice depends on “institutions” does just that, by implying that certain structures should be constructed so as to develop

[21] For an extended treatment of these critiques, see McNay (2008, p. 118-147).
[22] While the works of Honneth and of the early Foucault would be largely incompatible, the thought of the *late* Foucault upon which this thesis draws is much closer to the philosophical underpinnings of Honneth’s theory. For a similar interpretation, see Sinnerbrink (2011).

subjects who partake in mutual recognition practices. That is, as much as power presupposes the possibility of freedom (the late-Foucauldian point discussed in Section 3.3.3), social freedom cannot exist outside power structures, broadly understood – it must be designed into them. This reading deflates much of the post-structuralist critique which insists that Honneth still works within an overly idealist register (e.g. McQueen, 2015). Of course, it does not mean that recognition rules might not engender *distortion* of voice, which is how I describe situations where individuals see themselves forced, against their legitimate will, to transform themselves into socially recognizable subjects. Faced by the need of distortion, individuals might react in multiple ways: change completely, supress themselves, seek a compromise or, as Butler (2004, p. 3) puts it, decide to not be recognizable at all – "there are advantages to remaining less than intelligible". It is important to differentiate this kind of misrecognition from the kind described in the previous section, which Honneth (1992) originally defined as *denigration*, where no change to the subject is enough to render the individual recognizable and even the possibility of voice may be denied (e.g. racism).

A similarly complicated second aspect is linked to Honneth's implicit suggestion that all voices are entitled to the same level of social recognition. This expectation is "untenable": different individuals will always have different capacity and, thus, will be differently recognized – the very notion of esteem depends on this (Fraser, 2003, p. 32; see also McBride, 2009). This question raises problems about the limits to social recognition: are voices that are hostile to mutual recognition, such as authoritarian and "racist identities", entitled to individual recognition (Fraser, 2003, p. 38; Thompson, 2018, p. 570), a common liberal criticism of the so-called "identity politics" (Fukuyama, 2018)? After all, "how should recognition claims be judged?" (Fraser, 2003, p. 38). There is no all-encompassing, single fixed answer to this problem. For, as Honneth points out, the norms of social recognition are contextual, constantly changed and fought over. Nevertheless, it could be said that this judgment ought to have as its ethical lodestar, the mutual recognition value. This does not mean that all voices *must* be heard at all times equally, but that everyone must be able "to pursue social esteem under fair conditions of equal opportunity", in Fraser's (2003, p. 32) proposition of a similar point. That actors will disagree about how to interpret what counts as mutual recognition, and that these disagreements are themselves influenced by power relations, are unavoidable. This second criticism indicates that an individual whose voice is founded on the illegitimate misrecognition of other voices has no grounds to demand recognition or to complain about misrecognition if such recognition is denied to them. It does not follow, however, that, in practice, misrecognition-based voices are not socially recognized or that such recognition does not play a role in the constitution of one's self-esteem. It does play a role, an aspect that Honneth's theory tends to disregard due to its normative

focus. So, for instance, studies of why individuals join and continue to belong to neo-Nazi groups point to the sense of social worth these groups provide, although they may not use the term "recognition" (e.g. Blee, 2002; Koster & Houtman, 2008). Yet, in the perspective adopted here, such recognition is not a *proper normative* recognition, that is, it will not create the conditions for the development of an autonomous self, according to Honneth's parameters to what is "autonomy" (see Section 3.4.1).

Thirdly, in discussing institutions of recognition, Honneth refers repeatedly to their *mediating* role: they are "media of reflexive freedom" (Honneth, 2014, p. 43) or "mediating institutions that inform subjects in advance about the interdependence of their aims" (Honneth, 2014, p. 65). He seems to suggest that institutions mediate inasmuch as they enable the interaction of citizens, socializing them into practices which are respectful of mutual recognition. However, the mention of "media" suggests two shortcomings to his theory: the lack of an appreciation of how media spaces mediate recognition, and in what ways this mediated recognition is affected by the materiality of these spaces (Campanella, 2018). Deranty (2006) indicates that Honneth puts strong emphasis on "virtual" social structures (schemas, in the vocabulary developed in Section 3.3.2), but suggests that he largely neglects the fact that relations of recognition are themselves imbricated with "interactions between human and nonhuman beings… personal objects,… tools, machines" (Deranty, 2006, p. 128). Deranty's point is suggestive of all sorts of roles that non-human resources might play in how recognition happens. Particularly relevant for this thesis, is how media materiality can potentially change the visibility conditions that define the possibility of recognition. That some sort of visibility precedes recognition is acknowledged by Honneth (2001). By entering into one's visual field, individuals may be cognized. However, one might "look through" the acknowledged other, a form of "social invisibility" typical of interactions tinged, for example, by racism, which is a form of denigration (Honneth, 2001, p. 115). That is, the process of visibilizing does not in itself guarantee recognition: the former maintains with the latter, a necessary but insufficient relationship. In fact, it might lead to misrecognition.

The unresolved tension between mediated visibility and recognition is of central interest in this thesis. However, Honneth rarely extend his insights beyond face-to-face interactions. This precludes him from contemplating the relations of power that are embedded in spaces – such as datafied platforms. Even when he discusses media, such as newspapers and "the Internet" (see e.g. Honneth, 2014, p. 300-304), the role of mediated visibility is not addressed, and that of materiality in this relation is completely overlooked. That the configuration of spaces influences the exertion of voice by structuring "the visibility of subjects", is not a new observation (e.g. Noval, 2007, p. 102). This

is, arguably, the underlying theme of many criticisms of how spaces of civic participation function (Dahlberg, 2018; see also Fraser, 2007, pp. 76-77). Typically, when media and communications scholars examine this debate, notions of visibility/invisibility and recognition/misrecognition tend to be conflated such that it is assumed that the "very… visibility of an individual or group", in particular that of social minorities, "may be a valuable recognition" (Hjarvard, 2013, p. 150; Maia, 2014). While others have noticed the ambiguities of achieving mediated visibility to recognition (Dayan, 2013; Barnhurst, 2007), and explored in-depth the ethical complexities of granting recognition to distant others (Chouliariaki, 2013; Silverstone, 2006), there is an emerging concern over how datafied platforms have replaced a politics of visibility for an "economy of visibility", where being seen is stripped of its subversive character and becomes "an end in itself" (Banet-Weiser, 2019, p. 22; Gray, 2013). These are thought-provoking points, to which I return in Section 9.5.1. For now, it is important to notice that this third criticism points to another misrecognition, *invisibilization* of voice. It refers to how some voices, even when expressed and not necessarily deemed abnormal or inferior, may be prevented from being even acknowledged by certain others – usually due to spatial configurations.

In sum, albeit detrimental to the development of autonomy, the three forms of misrecognition explained in this section (*denigration*, *distortion* and *invisibilization*)[23] likely have productive consequences for the formation of self-understandings of both those who misrecognize and those who are misrecognized.

I suggest that this might be associated with authoritarianism. One consequence of Honneth's somewhat limited discussion of power is that he barely conceptualizes the structural impediments to recognition. I want to bring to the foreground an idea that is latent in much of his theory: authoritarianism. In both academic and popular discourse, authoritarianism is most often associated with a top down regime of unfreedom imposed on a given population by, often, charismatic and brutal strongmen and parties (see e.g. Linz, 1975/1995; O'Donnell, 1973). Studies tend to focus on policies, laws, institutional decisions and opinion polls to characterize governments and societies as "authoritarian" or "democratic", or, more often, somewhere in between (see e.g. Bermeo, 2016). Another matrix focuses on psychological traits, and their relation to wider social and economic conditions. This approach originates chiefly in the critical work of the Frankfurt School, conducted during or in the wake of Nazi-fascism. Empirically, the School's perhaps most important line of research regarding authoritarianism *per se* refers to the study of the typical social-psychological

[23] This index does not consider "anterior recognition" and its correspondent form of misrecognition, reification, i.e. to strip people of their human condition (Honneth, 2008), since this concept is not applicable given the aims of this thesis.

characteristics of authoritarian personalities such as the alleged propensity to submit to authorities and anti-intellectualism (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; see also Horkheimer, 1950). Theoretically, Adorno and Horkheimer's (1944/2002) conceptualization of the role of cultural industries in the constitution of subjects disinterested in their own freedom received enormous attention. In similar vein and context, Arendt (1951, p. 474) proposed that authoritarianism depends on social isolation, "insofar as… isolated men are powerless by definition" – loneliness would be thus a pre-condition for "the terror". Recently, noticing the lack of holistic definitions of the authoritarian phenomenon, Glasius (2018) proposed another way of looking at it – by paying attention to the social practices of (mainly) politicians and policymakers.

Understanding authoritarianism through recognition theory provides a relatively straight-forward philosophical basis that bridges these different views. Building on the last three sections, I suggest that, if authoritarianism represents, in abstract terms at least, the opposite of democracy, it can be defined as the inverted image of "democratic ethical life", the term used by Honneth to describe his ideal of democratic culture (see previous section). That is, it can be defined as the structural patterns of misrecognition that systematically constitute disrespected individuals, whose abilities to act autonomously and resist authority figures are likely damaged. These patterns might involve the establishment of state policies (in which case they would relate mostly to the denial of legal rights and obligations, the second parameter of recognition – see Section 3.4.1). However, they might be associated, also, with the everyday social practices of ordinary people, thereby undermining different facets of social recognition. This endows the idea of authoritarianism with a great deal of granularity. Instead of trying to ascertain whether/to what extent someone or a community is "democratic" or "authoritarian", the emphasis is on the ways in which one's reflective relationship with certain structures engenders certain practices of *denigration*, *distortion* and *invisibilization*. This brief discussion neither claims to advance Honneth's work nor exhausts the relationship between recognition theory and authoritarianism. My goal was to simply highlight this relationship, which I suggest is largely implied in Honneth's theory. Whereas my definition of authoritarianism is not a fully developed theory, it is developed enough to provide the basis for my discussion of bottom-up authoritarianism (Section 9.5). In the conceptual framework (Section 3.6.1), recognition theory, as discussed in this section, is combined with aspects of social practices theory to redefine the practice of citizenship as *civic voice*.

3.5. Thinking Critically about Datafication

So far, this chapter has taken two steps toward the formulation of this study's conceptual framework. After developing a general analytical foundation with elements of social practices theory (Section 3.3), it resorted to recognition theory to explain how democratic citizens come (and ought to come) into being (Sections 3.4). In this part, the chapter addresses a third, rather different problem: how to conceptualize Facebook's datafication power. This step is essential to understand in which ways Facebook, as a *datafied* platform, shapes the processes of civic becoming this thesis is interested in.

My argument evolves inductively. I begin with an overview of two key concepts – datafication and platform. Then, I review contrasting literatures within critical data studies which, explicitly or not, address how the datafication operations of platforms engender power relations. I observe that, in the light of this study's conceptual foundations and empirical interests, two aspects of these literatures can be foregrounded: the constitutive relations between datafication operations and individuals' understandings about these operations, and how these relations seem to govern end users' visibility. A theorization of datafication power that accounts for these two aspects might be framed by the notion of visibility regime – which I then introduce. These elements pave the way for the definition of Facebook's datafication power as exerted through an algorithmic visibility regime, which is formulated in the conceptual framework (the last part of the chapter, Section 3.5.2).

It is worth returning to the broad formulation offered in the introduction to Chapter 1. Datafication, Jose van Dijck (2014, p. 198) says, is the "transformation of social action into online quantified data" enacted by "real-time tracking" that allows for "predictive analysis". Her formulation does not fully capture the complex and increasingly diverse practices that multiple fields of activity are pressed to adopt in order to supposedly reap the benefits of "big data", in particular, those analysed by "Artificial Intelligence" (AI). However, it does indicate the two basic datafication operations that are the concern of this thesis. First, the rapid development of "enabling technologies, infrastructures [and] techniques" has driven the continuous production of unprecedentedly variegated and large amounts of digitalized data (Kitchin, 2014, p. 286). Embedded "into everyday business and social practices and spaces" (Kitchin, 2014, p. 286), these "enabling technologies" are supported significantly by hypertrophied variances of "dataveillance"; the "systematic use of personal data systems in the investigation or monitoring of the actions or communications of one or more persons" (Clarke, 1988, section 7; Raley, 2013). Second, these data undergo automated analysis, executed increasingly by machine learning algorithmic systems (Seaver, 2013), a form of artificial

intelligence directed at “transforming, constructing or imposing some kind of shape” on datasets in order to “discover, decide, classify, rank, cluster, recommend, label or predict what is happening or what will happen” (Mackenzie, 2015, p. 432; 2017). While large scale social quantification has been one of the defining features of Western modern states (Hacking, 1982; Starr, 1987), these datasets, techniques and services now often are controlled by – and are the property of – a handful of conglomerates, such as Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft, Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent, whose main products are datafied platforms.

To say that a datafied platform is a platform that is underpinned by dataveillance and algorithmic decision-making, as hinted at in Section 1.3, is an intuitive point – but it does not completely answer the question of what a “platform” is. Tarleton Gillespie (2010, 2017, 2018; cf. Carl & Hayes, 2015) demonstrates that the image of “platform” originates from a kind of software framework able to support other software. Over time, this computational definition has come to evoke “older meanings”: “an architecture from which to speak or act, like a train platform or a political stage” (Gillespie, 2017, para. 2). He notes that this shift has political connotations. It has “lent social media services” the aura of being “flat, open, sturdy”, naturalizing the assumption that these spaces are neutral and conducive to (negative) freedom. Crucially, the metaphor may obscure the designers’ responsibilities for the services of organizing, structuring and channelling information (Gillespie, 2017, para. 7). Therefore, it is paramount to consider the sprawling infrastructure of the stuff (data centres, cables) and the code (including machine learning algorithmic systems) that support instantiations of the platform’s end user interface (Plantin, Lagoze, Edwards, & Sandvig, 2016). Nevertheless, platforms are spaces of sociality among multiple actors – intermediaries of sorts, even if never neutral (Srnicek, 2019; Moore & Tambini, 2018). Despite some of these problems, I suggest that the term platform remains interesting precisely because it blends the promise of self-expression and social interaction with the material and economic nature of datafication operations. In so doing, it foregrounds the tensions between these two aspects and, hence, the essentially political character of these spaces.

Optimistic proponents of datafication in the first decade of the 21st century, seemed, at times, amazed by these platforms and the companies that built and controlled them. They predicted a datafied future in which reality somehow would speak for itself, unmediated, rendering previous explanatory human models “obsolete” (Anderson, 2008, para. 10) and ensuring “stability and fairness” (Pentland, 2014, p. 25). As it became increasingly clear that this new version of what Mosco (2004) had earlier called “digital sublime”, had not materialized, datafication received a huge backlash.

Echoes of this backlash can be identified in the fast-growing area of critical data studies (Seaver & Gillespie, 2017; Dalton, Craig, & Thatcher, 2016; boyd & Crawford, 2012). Much of this field concerns more or less explicit critiques of the ways in which datafication operations enable power relations (hereafter, datafication power[24]). As Beer (2017) notes, there appear to be two main approaches to this sort of power: (1) the power given to (usually) elite actors by the datafication operations themselves, which I refer to as a top-down approach; and (2) the power of the notions of datafication operations, particularly in relation to those individuals who, allegedly, are controlled by these operations, which I refer to as a bottom-up approach. I unpack these views in the following sections.

3.5.1. Datafication as Top-Down Power

This line of thought focuses strongly on the nexus between platform's business model, politics and technology, as Zuboff's (2019, 2015) work exemplifies. Zuboff (2019, p. 9) argues that datafication has given rise to "surveillance capitalism", a "new economic order that claims *human experience* as free raw material for *hidden* commercial practices [emphases added]" and aim at modifying the behaviour of individuals so as to best serve companies economic interests. In this view, datafication is not a disinterested exercise of scientific curiosity, as suggested by Anderson (2008). Rather, it is a scientific, for-profit system of practices that relies on an acute visibility inequality to datafy social life itself and, through algorithmic analysis, produce predictive models that can "anticipate" what each individual will "do now, soon and later" (Zuboff, 2019, p. 25; see Fogg's, 2003, conceptualization of computers as "persuasive technologies"; Yeung, 2017; cf. Couldry & Mejías, 2019). This technology maximizes companies' abilities to offer information that people will, indeed, consume – click, buy, see. Personalization – the process of offering end users what their previous datafied actions demonstrated they want to interact with (Turow, 2011) – is a crucial instantiation of "the utopia of certainty" (Zuboff, 2019, p. 980).

"Surveillance capitalism" is said to be underpinned by "instrumentarian power", a new authoritarianism that Zuboff compares with 20th century fascist states. Although totalitarian and instrumentarian powers are both defined by their disregard for freedom, historical novelty and radical dreams of total domination, they are, she suggests, in many ways, the opposite. Zuboff points out that instrumentarian power has no political ideology, no interest in bodily violence or ethnic extermination. Looking at people from the same disinterested perspective as "radical behaviourists",

[24] I employ this term as synonymous with what is sometimes called "algorithmic power". Given the proposition that datafication encompasses both dataveillance and algorithmic data analysis, I consider this terminology clearer.

this power "only cares that whatever we do is *accessible* to its ever-evolving operations of rendition, calculation, modification, monetization, and control [original emphasis]" (Zuboff, 2019, p. 686). Its means are not "hierarchical administration of terror", but the "ownership of the means of behaviour modification". While not using the term authoritarianism, Cohen (2013, p. 1917; see also Cohen, 2011,) argues that unchecked dataveillance on an industrial scale, erodes democracy by undermining the conditions for the flourishing of the ideal democratic self. She states that, instead of citizens, platforms aim to constitute "tractable, predictable" consumers, unwilling to accept uncomfortable diversity and uncapable fully governing themselves.

Other authors, partly in reaction to the resurgence of authoritarian governments, politicians and activists (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019), tend to argue that datafied technologies are not necessarily authoritarian themselves – they *enable* authoritarian actors. In this case, the argument, typically, is that ordinary citizens may fall prey to those who aim "to sow confusion, ignorance, prejudice, and chaos in order to undermine public accountability" (Deibert, 2019, p. 31; Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Turner, 2019; Bradshaw & Howard, 2017; Siva, 2018; MacKinnon, 2011; cf. Fuchs, 2018). From this perspective, the maliciously engineered "cacophony of opinions and the flood of information" on platforms degrade public discourse by creating "the perfect environment" for the (often automated) spread of falsehoods, conspiracy theories, rumours, and leaks, in addition to guiding end users "into online 'filter bubbles' in which they feel comfortable and ideologically aligned" (Deibert, 2019, p. 32; Woolley, 2016; but, see Borgesius et al., 2016; Tucker et al., 2018, for summaries of the empirical inconsistencies in the notion of "filter bubble"; cf. Pariser, 2011). Others see platforms as enabling "hyperleaders" – which might or not become authoritarian figures (Gerbaudo, 2018, p. 150). Furthermore, it has been argued that the Internet has proven to be a "tool" that "authoritarians" employ to identify and persecute "activists, dissidents and journalists" (Deibert, 2019, p. 34) and to produce social conformity through the datafied classification of its citizens, as exemplified by the experiments surrounding the so-called Chinese social credit system (Creemers, 2017).

Both those who see datafication operations as themselves being authoritarian and as enabling authoritarians, are often concerned with opacity. They argue that a key reason for the rise of companies, such as Google and Facebook, is that, in addition to their economic, technical and political assets, their datafication operations are technically, legally and administratively designed to be seamless and unknowable (Zuboff, 2019; Pasquale, 2015; Chalmers & MacColl, 2003; Araújo, 2016). The central argument in this context is that, once end users (and regulators also, in general) are impeded from seeing, accessing and, thus, judging dataveillance and algorithmic decision-making,

social and legal accountability are severely hampered. Actualizing the Marxist view of the cultural order that sustained the brutalities of the early industrial revolution, Zuboff (2019, p. 722) claims that "false consciousness is no longer produced by the hidden facts of class and their relation to production but rather by the hidden facts of instrumentarian power", which usurps "the rights to answer the essential questions: Who knows? Who decides? Who decides who decides?" (see also Cheney-Lippold, 2011; Lash, 2007). Along these lines, privacy is not so much eroded, but "redistributed": "instead of people having the rights to decide how and what they will disclose, these rights are concentrated in the domain of surveillance capitalism" (Zuboff, 2019, p. 226). In addition to companies' efforts to conceal platforms' inner workings and objectives, are the intricacies of datafication operations and end users' low level of technical literacy (Burrell, 2016).

Thus, at the heart of how datafication enables control, there is a fundamental visibility inequality between "sorters" and "sortees": the former pervasively monitor the latter, who have very little insight into how this monitoring is employed to control them (Andrejevic, 2014; boyd & Crawford, 2012). Even when the authoritarian actors are ordinary end users (e.g. "trolls" and "gamegaters" – Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Nagle, 2017), the assumption is that these actors act upon others who are seen as susceptible to this external action.

3.5.2. Datafication as Bottom-up Power

A second critical view changes the focus – from the political and economic usage by powerful actors of datafication to its instantiation "as culture", that is, the "manifold consequences of a variety of human practices" (Seaver, 2017, p. 4; Devendorf & Goodman, 2014; see also Mol, 2002; cf. Striphas, 2015). A growing literature has highlighted the importance of investigating these practices (Beer, 2009; Ziewitz, 2016; Roberge & Melancon, 2017, p. 318; Bucher, 2018; Beer, 2017; Milan & Treré, 2019; van Dijck, 2013; see also Ananny & Crawford, 2016; Neyland, 2016). This other literature asks: "What does it mean for ordinary people that their personal data" (and therefore themselves) "are increasingly tracked, sorted, and monetized?" (Livingstone, 2018, p. 2). Datafied systems are described as material elements with which "social actors develop more or less reflexive relationships", even if the actual parts of these system remain invisible to the naked eye (Bucher, 2018, pp. 61-62; Gillespie, 2017a; 2016). After all, "whatever its appearance of complexity, even of opacity, the social world remains something accessible to interpretation and understanding" (Couldry & Hepp, 2016, p. 25). From this perspective, datafication, like previous forms of social quantification (e.g. Espeland & Stevens, 2008), is neither a process of "data extraction", as Mayer-Schonberger and Cukier (2013) would contend, nor a unidirectional process of almost unescapable control, as Zuboff (2019)

sometimes implies. Instead, precisely because it works as a "computational rendition of reality" (Kallinikos, 2009, p. 186), it becomes a socially "productive force" (Milan, 2018, p. 508). This suggests that, in not only quantifying discrete events, actions or opinions but also attempting to map out social life itself, algorithmic decisions are fed "back to end users", helping them to "orient themselves in the world" (Kennedy, Poell, & van Dijck, 2015, p. 1). Thus, instead of revealing concealed realities or producing effects on end users, datafication, in this view, is entangled in a "recursive loop between the calculations of the algorithm and the 'calculations' of people" (Gillespie, 2013, p. 17).

A central insight of this second critical view is that a significant number of end users construct *some* form of "notion" (Beer, 2017) about the two main operations of datafication – even if this understanding amounts to ambiguous "known unknowns" (Bucher, 2018). This has been demonstrated empirically to apply to dataveillance – even without awareness of its technical intricacies (Barnes, 2006; Hargittai & Marwick, 2016; Lupton & Michael, 2017; Turow, Henessy, Draper, & Virgilio, 2018; Knapp, 2016). Lately, several works have tried to explain how people make sense of algorithmic decision-making operations. Echoing what audience studies have demonstrated for decades (Livingstone, 2018), they suggest that end users do not stare passively at screens.

Observation of their feeds reveals patterns of (in)visibility, that the individual can compare to what they thought should be shown to them, allowing them to infer a "mismatch" between these patterns and their "expectations about how the News Feed should work" (Rader & Gray, 2015, p. 179; Eslami et al., 2015). It might be that posts/ "friends" that participants are missing from their feeds or are appearing at a different frequency or in a different order to what they prefer (Rader & Gray, 2015, p. 179). Based on these findings, end users appear to achieve an awareness of algorithmic decisions through their perception of a "mistake" – that is, algorithms become perceptible if their visible decisions contrast with the end users' preferences. This sensation has been termed variously as "faulty predictions" (Bucher, 2017, p. 35), "user surprises" (Rader, 2017) and "algorithmic disappointment" (Eslami, Karahalios, & Hamilton, 2017; see DeVito, Birnholtz, & Hancock 2017; Vaccaro et al., 2017).

Sometimes, making sense of these connections apparently involves amazement. This happens when end users realize the extent of dataveillance – what Bucher (2017, p. 35) calls a "whoa moment" and Knapp (2016) describes as "unfolding". Less often, end users intentionally introduce an input into an algorithmic system in order to probe it (Eslami et al., 2017, p. 6; Knapp, 2016, p. 168; Bucher, 2017, p. 36). In these examples, people seem to make sense of datafication operations by making connections between what they see on their screens and their past actions. These findings are usually

understood as exemplifying the assumption that, as infrastructures, algorithmic systems become visible when they break down (Starr, 1999). End users may also identify forms of unsolicited feedback from the system. Rader and Gray (2015, p. 179; see also DeVito et. al, 2018) describe how people speculate about algorithms by sensing that "an entity—usually either "Facebook" or an "algorithm"—[is] making inferences about their preferences". Visible interactions, such as "likes", have been described as the most important information users employ to understand how Facebook manages their visibility (Bernstein, Bakshy, Burke, & Karrer, 2013).

Another, less well explored way that people appear to make sense of algorithmic decision-making is through information, such as that found in the press and/or communicated by friends, family and partners (DeVito, Birnholtz, Hancock, French, & Liu, 2018; Eslami et al. 2015) and "replicated, queried, questioned or confirmed" in their everyday lives (Knapp, 2016, p. 203; see also Bucher, 2017, p. 38; Bishop, 2019; Lomborg & Kapsch, 2019). Furthermore, Instagram professional "influencers" have been described as seeking information and using data analytics to learn the "rules" of the "algorithmic game" (Cottler, 2019).

It has been suggested that the understandings end users develop about platforms' datafication operations give rise to more or less formalized mental representations. Adopting a concept from cognitive science (Gelman & Legare, 2011), some have proposed that end users hold "folk theories" of ubiquitous computing (Poole, Dantec, Eagan & Edwards, 2008) and, in particular, of algorithmic systems. Algorithm folk theories would include the "non-authoritative conceptions" that "circulate informally" among ordinary end users ("non-professionals") about how these systems work (Eslami et. al, 2016, p. 2). Some of the "theories" found during previous empirical research describe algorithms as driven by "personal engagement" and "global popularity" (Eslami et. al, 2016, p. 5-6), or assume these systems to be a kind of "rational assistant", "unwanted observer", "transparent platform" and "corporate black box" (French & Hancock, 2017; see also DeVito et al., 2018; West, 2018). Others point out that datafication may also be deployed as a form of ideology to promote "the virtues of calculation, competition, efficiency, objectivity and the need to be strategic" (Beer, 2017, p. 9) and the "widespread belief in the objective quantification" (van Dijck, 2014, p. 198). Closer to the theoretical positioning of this thesis, the notion of "imaginary" has also been used to conceptualize these representations. In Bucher's words, Facebook end users hold "algorithmic imaginaries", which, rather than "a false belief or fetish of sorts" (Bucher, 2017, p. 31), are "ways of thinking about what algorithms are, what they should be, how they function and what these imaginaries in turn make possible" (Bucher, 2017, p. 39; see also Mukherjee, 2019; Smith, 2018).

This literature proposes that mental representations of datafication operations ("folk theories", "ideologies", "imaginaries") prompt "adjustments" by end users (Couldry, Fotopoulou, & Dickens, 2016, p. 123). Part of the research on these adjustments is influenced by dramaturgical sociology, particularly neo-Goffmanian writings on how online identity is strategically performed. Before the rise of datafication as a major critical paradigm, these performances (or "self-presentations") were analysed in relation to what has been termed "networked privacy", according to which the design of platforms collapses different "social contexts" and obscures what other users can or cannot see of one's platform performances (e.g. Marwick & boyd, 2014). These conditions would lead individuals to construct certain "imagined audiences", which have been found to be either abstract or targeted and, often, changing depending on the characteristics of the performance (e.g. Litt & Hargittai, 2016; Litt, 2016). Unable to *not* be seen, end users then tailor these practices through, for example, "self-censorship" and encoded messages (Marwick & boyd, 2011; Marwick & boyd, 2014; Das & Kramer, 2013). Studies of datafication that draw on this tradition suggest that understandings about algorithmic decision-making operations "guide self-presentation behaviours" by "mediating the relationship between self and audience" on platforms (DeVito et al., 2018, pp. 7, 9; DeVito et al., 2017; West, 2018). It has also been proposed that understandings about surveillants lead people to change who can see their actions (through "Privacy Settings" functionalities) even who the users are through use of pseudonyms (Duffy & Chan, 2018; Hargittai & Marwick, 2016). Some actors seem to format their "self-presentations" to increase their visibility. Instagram professional "influencers", for instance, have been shown to try to "game" algorithmic decision-making by building "authentic" relationships with their audiences or inflating metrics (Cottler, 2019; see Dayan, 2013, for an earlier articulation of a similar point).

Another, emerging strand of work is more closely aligned to the late-Foucauldian theoretical matrix that informs this thesis (see Section 3.3.3 above), but not necessarily interested in citizenship. In this view, performance is less a strategic projection of an identity than a means through which individuals form themselves. In relation to datafication, it has been argued that platforms incite the "algorithmic self-optimization" of its users by unequally "rewarding with visibility" those whose performances comply with the platform's business model (Bishop, 2018, p. 81; Introna, 2016). These works have an important predecessor, namely, the notion of self-branding. This refers to normative and entrepreneurial "technologies of the self", such as "self-promotion and advertising techniques", through which people strive not only to act as, but to *become* their "authentic" self – in particular, on spaces such as Facebook (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 55, 80-85; Hearn, 2008; Marwick, 2013).

Taking stock of the views discussed in this and in the previous sections, datafication in the context of platforms might be defined as the set of processes through which increasing aspects of human existence become digitalized *and* are fed into AI algorithmic systems so as to be returned to end users in the form of automated decisions, triggering reflection and action.

This definition highlights the link between what datafication operations do and what end users do with datafication operations. While both approaches recognize this link, they do not necessarily specify how it might inform a definition of datafication power. Top-down approaches are concerned with the ways in which the opaque nature of dataveillance and algorithmic decision-making affect end users engagement with platforms – but are less interested in the possibility that this engagement might engender *some* autonomous understanding about these operations. Bottom-up approaches unpack these sensemaking experiences – but tend to downplay how they are shaped by the materiality of those datafication operations, or at least by the political nature of this materiality.

Sewell (1992 – see Section 3.3.1) helps us to reconsider this link. Indeed, datafication operations, as defined by scholars like Zuboff, resemble his definition of resources, and more specifically, non-human resources, which controllers of platforms employ to exert power over end users for economic, political and social gains. Likewise, works that look at datafication from the bottom-up appear to be largely interested in what Sewell defines as schemas – how ideas about platforms' operating rules come into being, which ideas are these, and how they are associated with end users' actions. Therefore, if Sewell is correct, datafied platforms might be understood as a structure, one in which there is an enormously concentrated distribution of resources – which effectuate and is effectuated, to use his terminology, by schemas.

Before unpacking how such structure might be understood as engendering power relations in their attempt to order the prefiguration of end users' actions (what is done in the conceptual framework), a second question might be raised. If datafied platforms like Facebook are structures, *what* do they structure? Platforms are remarkably complex spaces, populated by a plethora of elements that might be defined as governing a plethora of phenomena. Yet, I suggest that we can answer this question by foregrounding another topic of the literatures discussed in this and in the previous sections. It can be said that datafied platforms govern, primarily, end users' *visibility* (this is made particularly clear by Gillespie, 2017a; Flyverbom, 2016; Plantin, 2018, p. 4; Milan, 2015). This term means different things to different authors. Under the top-down perspective examined above,

the emphasis is given to the erosion of privacy[25] by dataveillance procedures, and to the creation of news feeds in which end users' are exposed to personalized content. Works that investigate datafication from the bottom up expand this scope, and tend to be interested in both how end users negotiate their lack of privacy and in their eventual "quest" to be seen by others. Given my focus on end users' practices, this expanded focus was deemed more fruitful. Furthermore, as explained in Section 3.4.2, visibility is the necessary but insufficient condition for social recognition – an aspect that, while hardly explored by Honneth, is of immense importance for the possibility of the practice of citizenship, as it becomes clear in Section 3.6.3.

Visibility entails thus more than just the condition of being visually perceivable to others – it is also about seeing and becoming legible to institutions. If we are to conceptualize the government of visibility by Facebook in a way that encompasses these multiple dimensions (and their productive nature), it is useful to resort to the notion of media visibility regimes, I suggest.

3.5.3. Media Visibility Regimes

As approached here, the notion of visibility regime originates from critical theorizations about how spaces[26] are designed so as to control visibility patterns and engender not only domination, as Foucault (1977) originally proposed about the Panopticon, but also processes of self-formation (Manokha, 2018; see also Lyon, 2017). This study is not the first to use the term in relation to datafied platforms. Bucher (2012, p. 1164) argues that Facebook turns the Panopticon inside out, imposing not the "threat of an all-seeing vision machine, but the constant possibility of disappearing and becoming obsolete". Many authors have dealt directly or indirectly with the idea of a visibility regime, in particular, surveillance scholars (for a summary, see Bruno, 2013).[27] Brighenti (2010) provides a more comprehensive assessment – in particular regarding the relationship between visibility and media.

For him, a "regime of visibility" suggests that visibility is not only the exercise of physical vision (what one sees or fails to see), but a social category, that is, a "phenomenon that is inherently ambiguous, highly dependent upon contexts and complex social, technical and political

[25] Throughout this thesis, the expression "privacy" rarely surfaces. For, although privacy may be helpful to think critically about dataveillance, and in particular of its legal dimensions, it is not very helpful for clarifying the *need* to be visible. Visibility, on the other hand, might be employed to consider both – attempts to be and not to be visibilized. For a work on privacy that touches on the preoccupations of this thesis, see Cohen (2013).
[26] Surveillance scholars are keen on stressing that electronic surveillance is not limited to one particular space, as the Panopticon metaphor implies; indeed, Facebook may be said to exemplify this point (see a summary in Lyon, 2017). Given my interest in end users' actions and perceptions, this fragmentation is important inasmuch as it is articulated by interviewees – as it indeed is (see e.g. Section 6.3.1).

arrangements" (Brighenti, 2010, p. 3). Visibility regimes, he says, are the "systematic and routinary (i.e. invisible) set-up of visibilities in contemporary social-technological complexes" (Brighenti, 2010, p. 39). Unpacking this formulation, it is possible to differentiate between three components. First, there is the very notion of *regime,* "a repeated, agreed upon and more or less settled pattern of interactions" (Brighenti, 2010, p. 45). Second, the blueprint of these patterns of interactions might be called visibility diagrams. Diagrams assign specific positions to certain social actors, which, in turn, allows these actors to see and be seen through distinct "vectors" of visibility. Third, both the diagram and the interactions it patterns, end up settling "a series of normative questions": (i) "what is worth paying attention to"; (ii) what we have a right to observe"; and (iii) what can be seen safely, taking pleasure from it" (Brighenti, 2010, p. 45). The answers to these questions establish "the set of conditions that must be met" in order to become visible and invisible, what defines "the reciprocal constitutions of subjects" (Brighenti, 2010, p. 45).

Media technologies have given rise to new and highly consequential forms of visibility regimes, "freed from the spatial and temporal properties of the here and now" (Thompson, 2005, p. 35). Two of those discussed by Brighenti are helpful to make sense of the visibility regime of datafied platforms. First, the *broadcast,* which relates to mass media. Its diagram may be visually represented as a cone with a very wide base (the audiences/readership) and a very narrow tip (media professionals and their messages). Building on Brighenti, it might be said that this diagram is comprised of two basic vectors. First, what audiences see, a central area of study in the media and communications field. Theories such as gatekeeping (see Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, for a critical review) and framing (see Vreese, 2005, for a critical review) tackle how media organizations answer the "normative questions" mentioned above, when deciding what audiences could and should see (see also Thompson, 1995). Since this vector refers to what becomes physically visible, I hereafter refer to it as *sight vector*. The other vector refers to how mass media organizations seek to make their audiences visible to them, in ways that, usually, are informational and rarely physical. This I call the *readability vecto*r, that is, how the controllers of a mediated regime of visibility make the participants of such regime *legible* (cf. Scott, 1998). The long history of attempts to measure TV audiences' viewing habits so as to construct these individuals is described by Ang (1991, p. 3) "as an objectified category of others to be controlled" which could, or could not, influence how the first vector is operationalized (see Webster, 2014, for an assessment of contemporary practices of audience measurement).

A second regime of mediated visibility described by Brighenti is typical of the pre-datafication spaces of online participation (e.g. blogs, forums and early platforms). This regime has in the *network*

its ideal diagram: a collection of similar nodes linked by straight lines with dialogical flows of visibility through which all nodes are, in principle, capable of seeing one another – what Castells (2007, p. 246) seems to characterize as mass self-communication. This supposedly horizontal and dialogical architecture is said to turn participants into active nodes, creating a profound instability in *the sight vector*. The network visibility regime has made it "much more difficult for those in power to ensure" that the contents shown to "individuals are those they would wish to see circulated" (Thompson, 2005, p. 35). However, it has created the possibility for skilful powerful actors to manipulate their visibility, gaming or circumventing media professionals (Thompson, 2005, p. 35). Similarly, the network has also increased the complexity of the *readability vector,* since it allows for the proliferation of decentralized dataveillance. Advertisers developed invisible computational techniques to track end users as they browsed the Internet, with the goal of using this behavioural data to construct profiles and visibilize personalized ads (see Turow, 2011, for a history of these developments). While this sort of operation affected only a small proportion of what end users could see on the Internet (mostly, ads), this relation between *seeing* and *being read was to* become an essential part of the visibility regime of datafied platforms – a sort of media that Brighenti does not discuss.

Similar to other kinds of media technologies, datafied platforms seem to be composed of the two kinds of visibility vectors described above: end users see content on the platform's news feed (sight vector) and are read by platforms' controllers (readability vector). However, these two vectors are materialized differently from previous media visibility regimes, since they embody the two main datafication operations. The framework developed below explains what an algorithmic visibility regime might be and how it might engender power relations.

3.6. Conceptual Framework

The chapter's last part further develops and positions the main concepts which inform the conceptual framework in this thesis and describes how they are integrated in this study. It begins with civic voice.

3.6.1. Citizenship as Civic Voice

Drawing on non-naturalist assumptions of citizenship (Section 3.2), on social practices theory (Section 3.3) and on the discussion of social recognition (Section 3.4), citizenship is defined in this thesis as civic voice, the social practice of civic self-representation through which individuals constitute themselves as citizens. By civic self-representation, I mean what a social actor, at any given moment, thinks best represents its wish to contribute to a polity – that is, any community that addresses

antagonisms typical of "the political" (Section 3.2). Formulated in this way, civic voice can be conceived as the normative intersection of civic voice expressions (the actions whereby individuals represent themselves politically) and civic self-understandings (how individuals comprehend themselves *qua* citizens).

Three general characteristics of civic voice can be underlined. Firstly, civic voice is a self-evaluative project, which, once enacted (or intentionally not enacted), generates processes of (mis)recognition, whereby one's expressions are (mis)recognized, and informs the self-constitution of oneself as a citizen. Drawing on Emirbayer and Mische (1998), by *project,* I mean the cognitive-emotional process whereby individuals identify their intentions and decide on a plan to realize them, before evaluating this plan in the face of concrete conditions and, finally, executing it (see Section 3.3.2 for details of these sub-elements). These stages are not necessarily linear. The emotional need to have one's civic self-understanding recognized by others is a primordial reason why individuals express their civic voice. It is not the case that individuals necessarily intend to receive personal praise, but that they tend to talk on the assumption that their voice will generate some form of social contribution. Two basic objects are understood to inform this project: those regarding any subject matter that is not civic recognition *per se* and those that do regard civic recognition. The latter might be termed the struggle for civic voice, which aims at unveiling and changing the conditions of civic recognition: what counts as civic worth and how such worth is granted – to whom and under which logics.

Secondly, processes of civic becoming unfold through a dynamic relationship between civic self-understanding, (mis)recognitions and civic voice expressions. In having an expression of one's self-understanding recognized by others (heard), individuals may come to understand that they possess civic worth, generating civic esteem, that is, the feeling of being a citizen whose actions bear upon the definition of social condition. Being heard is, in this view, the condition to be an autonomous citizen. While, in this framing, individuals ought to respect mutual recognition, no-one must be obliged to recognize anyone in any *concrete* instance. Rather, individuals ought to regard themselves and others as, in principle, entitled to be heard.[28] In this view, civic voices ought to be – but are not necessarily – democratic. Whether a civic voice can be considered democratic depends upon whether or not it is supported by and aims at mutual recognition. Civic *mis*recognition occurs when civic voice, while embracing mutual recognition, is explicitly denigrated, distorted or invisibilised; if reproduced by

[28] Therefore, this thesis rejects the suggestion that hate speech might be conducive to democracy. However, see Heinze (2016).

structures, civic misrecognitions may be characterized as engendering authoritarianism (Section 3.4.2). Civic misrecognition is likely to lead individuals to feel an incapable, and thus unfree citizen. In both cases, these feelings are expected to influence one's civic self-understanding, what can change civic voice expressions, and so on. It is, thus, improbable that an individual will crystalize into an immutable citizen. Civic voices, both as expressions and as self-understandings, are malleable.

Thirdly, the constitution of civic voice (the processes of civic becoming) is inherently influenced by various structures, two of which are the focus in this study. The ways individuals create the project of how they want to represent themselves as citizens and reflect upon/adapt/ execute this project, are prefigured by *civic imaginaries.*[29] Building on Taylor's (2004) notion of social imaginary as the "too obvious to mention" normative assumptions about social life and Honneth's norms of social worth, civic imaginary is understood here as a set of implicit assumptions about what civic worth is and to whom it is granted. This prefiguration is essentially normative. The qualification of what is the good, right, appropriate, possible, necessary or dangerous courses of action to represent oneself, is linked to the individual subjective understanding of location in this broader moral framework. It is also relational. While Honneth writes of fixed sets or norms used to define social recognition, it seems fair to assume that individuals in unequal social positions imagine these norms asymmetrically. For, as in the case of social imaginaries, these are informed by the social "materiality" of life (as described by Taylor): e.g. income, gender and race, to which the unequal distribution of resources is central. Thus, asymmetric societies are likely to engender civic-self understandings that are assumed by their holders to be "inferior" or "unrecognizable", or "superior" and "recognizable" in relation to others. In addition, since becoming visible (cognizable) is an indispensable and insufficient condition for (mis)recognition, civic voices are influenced, also, by structures that govern visibility. That is, while the absence of visibility engenders a particular kind of misrecognition (invisibilization), its availability does not guarantee that mis/recognition will happen. In making a civic voice (in)visible in certain ways, these structures might lead the individual to qualify certain civic voice expressions in certain ways. The same voice expression might be considered beneficial with certain interlocutor, but dangerous with another. The next section conceptualizes which sort of structure might characterize Facebook – and, thus, order the prefiguration of civic voice expressions on the platform.

[29] While not using recognition theory or Taylor's notion of social imaginary, Isin and Ruppert (2015, p. 30) also talk about an "imaginary of citizenship produced through thought, symbols, images, ideas, and ideals of the democratic citizen".

3.6.2. Facebook's Datafication Power Through the Algorithmic Visibility Regime[30]

Based on my definition of datafication (Section 3.5.2), on the concept of media visibility regime (Section 3.5.3), and on social practices theory (Section 3.3), Facebook's datafication power in this thesis is defined as based on an algorithmic visibility regime, a kind of structure (Section 3.3.1). Through this regime, the platform defines who can visibilize whom and attempts to control the prefiguration of end users' actions (Section 3.3.3) in ways that are beneficial to its business model.[31]

First, let me explain in which ways Facebook's datafication operations seems to enact a visibility regime. The platforms' *readability vector* is comprised of advanced forms of dataveillance, supported by sprawling infrastructural resources. In the case of Facebook, in addition to datafying all actions and content related to end users within the platform, this infrastructure also produces or receives different kinds of data from devices, Internet browsers and plugins, as the company itself acknowledges (Facebook, 2019). The second vector (*sight vector*) uses machine learning algorithms to define what end users are exposed to on their news feeds and interface – crucial resource more generally. Although some have found them to be guided by a mix of six factors (popularity; similarity between end users, ties between end users, paid sponsorship of content, subscription to content and newness – Ochigame & Holston, 2016), how precisely these factors are coded and balanced against each other is ultimately unknown. For this study's purposes, solving this puzzle (if a solution is possible) is a marginal issue. What matters is that, to employ Mackenzie's (2015) language, algorithms are constantly inventing relational "shapes" on the datasets produced by end users previous datafied actions, so as continuously to update what counts as "relevant" to a specific end user. Based on this analysis, these algorithms determine probabilistically which existing content an end user will deem more or less relevant and then make this content visible to the end user before she can decide whether or not to see it.

On datafied platforms, the sight and readability vectors are, by default, entangled, I suggest. The regime echoes an algorithmic logic: how end users are made readable (input) necessarily informs the definition by the regime of what they can see (output); this, in turn, delimits what users can act upon, hence, defining how they can be made readable – and so on. Certainly, end users constantly

[30] Many of my ideas about algorithmic visibility regime emerged during my conversations and co-authored work with Jun Yu (see Magalhães & Yu, 2017).

[31] Throughout this thesis, I use "Facebook" and "platform" to refer not to particular human actors but to either the datafied platform that is controlled by a private company called Facebook or to the organization itself. Thus, when I discuss or imply the "intentions" of "Facebook", I refer to the presumed objectives of this private company to further its business model, according to what is publicly known or theorized. What are the "real" intentions of its individual controllers and coders is not of interest here.

make their own decisions about what to see on the platform; companies acquire external data to understand users that are not produced by how they act on the platform; and there is an increasing number of one-sided actions by platforms to moderate content and ban profiles (e.g. Gillespie, 2018). Therefore, this entanglement should not be taken as determining the entirety of the visibility phenomena on Facebook. However, it does portray the typical visibility regime of datafied platforms.

This regime, as noted in Section 3.6.2, is defined in this thesis as a structure, in Sewell's (1992) sense: the operation of these vectors (Facebook's non-human resources) are associated with the construction of schemas (in this study, end users' understanding of the rules guiding these operations). This structure, I propose based on the literature discussed in Section 3.5.1, is crucial to the platform's business model. This model is widely believed to be concerned, predominantly, with increasing the number of end users so as to benefit from "network effects", enhancing the profiling of these users so as to optimize the placement of advertisements, and avoiding any form of transparency[32] and tampering (see also, Taplin, 2017, p. 131; Galloway, 2017, p. 238; Vogelstein, 2012; Martínez, 2016). Therefore, Facebook might be said to want its end users to (1) interact as often as possible with what the platform offers, but also to (2) remain ignorant of its inner workings.

In order to accomplish these two goals, I suggest that the platform attempts to lead end users to endow certain actions towards the regime with certain meanings. Or, as explained in Section 3.3.3, Facebook might be said to try to order the prefiguration of these users' actions towards itself. Table 3.1 below provides a summary of how this form of power is theorized in this thesis. According to my definition of prefiguration, this form of control involves particular materializations of the resources of the two visibility vectors. In relation to the s*ight vector*, it might be said that Facebook attempts to materialize its end user news feed as *personalized*, in the hope that it will be understood by end users as relevant. This is expected to lead users to qualify (i.e. prefigure) any datafied action in relation to the content offered on the news feed or elsewhere in the interface, as "enticing".[33] The more Facebook datafies an end user's actions, the more it is able to enhance the profile of that user and offer ads (or other services) on which she will, indeed, click and engage with. In using "enticing", I signal that this qualification need not be positive, good or socially acceptable. Hating, harming or mocking others, for instance, might well be enticing actions – although there is no evidence that the platform intends individuals to act in these ways. In relation to the r*eadability* vector: in its seeming bid to avoid external forms of control over its visibility regime, Facebook seems intent on ensuring

[32] At least this seemed to be the case at the time of my fieldwork; see Section 10.4.
[33] See also the notion of recommendation systems as "traps" (Seaver, 2018).

that its infrastructural resources (which datafy and read end user's actions) are materialized as *inscrutable* to these users (see again Section 3.5.1). The aim appears to be to produce not an action, but an *in*action. More than avoiding external accountability, this second prefiguration might also preserve the platform from attempts to "game" the regime.[34] Furthermore, as the visibility vectors are inherently entangled, these attempts to control end users' actions might aim to effectively prevent end users' from even realizing that the algorithmic visibility regime, at least as a way to exert power over users, even exists. In this view, *ideally*, Facebook users' would understand the rules defining who can visibilize whom on the platform as seamless and natural extensions of their wishes, and not the result of intricate and contestable logics.

In both cases, following my discussion of schematization (Section 3.3.2), these materializations might be said to be an attempt to direct end users' "systems of relevancies" when using the platform. Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime appears to be materialized to lead end users to pay attention to some "areas of reality" (its news feed) and ignore others (its infrastructure), possibly leading users to identity one particular pattern – the enticing "relevance" of the interface and of the platform, more generally. Whether these attempts are successful, however, is unclear. Aligned with my emphasis on reflexivity, this sort of datafication power remains, ultimately, uncertain.

	Materialization of Resources	Schema	Prefiguration Ordering
Sight Vector	Personalized Interface (news feed)	Relevant	All actions toward news feed content are *enticing*
Readability Vector	Inscrutable Infrastructure	None (Unimaginable)	All actions toward the infrastructure are *impossible*

Table 3.1. Summary of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime. Source: Author.

3.6.3. Civic Voice Under Algorithmic Visibility Conditions

Based on the foregoing definitions, this last section of the conceptual framework indicates how I conceptualize the shaping of civic voice by Facebook's algorithmic visibility. It can be argued that the platform's datafication operations do not shape end users' actions directly. The primary site of this sort of datafication power is whether and how the regime's visibility vectors directs how they are made sense of by end users. The schemas that stem from this first moment then become the immediate structural element that may influence users' actions in relation to the algorithmic visibility

[34] This is common to various platforms. See, e.g. Ziewitz (2019) for a description of how search engines try to stifle the work of SEO consultants.

regime – including those related to their civic voice expressions and, potentially, to their civic self-understandings. Below, I break this process down into three components and propose corresponding sub research questions (SRQs) to investigate them.

1. **The Schematization of Facebook's Algorithmic Visibility Regime.** If Facebook's double attempt to order the prefiguration of end users' actions is indeterminate, as the previous section proposed, it might be formulated as giving rise to certain schematizations that are not necessarily those the platform expects to produce. The empirical literature discussed in Section 3.5.2, provides such evidence: end users have been shown to discover the infrastructure of platforms by becoming surprised by the patterns they observe in their news feeds, reading and talking about platforms' functioning and, less often, by trying to test algorithmic systems. This thesis's conceptual grounding enables an investigation of how the very materiality of the regime bears upon end users' schematizations, that is, how a "personalized" news feed and a "inscrutable" infrastructure direct the attention of end users to certain areas of reality, and in which ways end users can identity, in these areas, patterns that, in their view, elucidate the rules behind who can visibilize whom on Facebook. This component is analysed in Chapter 5, where I present findings addressing **SRQ 1: How do ordinary end users schematize datafied platforms' algorithmic visibility regime?**

2. **The Social Imaginaries of Facebook's Algorithmic Visibility Regimes**. The second component of this shaping process refers to which schemas are (or not) formed through the processes examined in the first component. But which schemas are these? An algorithmic regime of visibility is not, I suggest, a mere set of functionalities/datafication operations or stand-alone technologies. It is also a collection of processes and decisions designed to enable certain interactions and a certain sociality. Schemas about these regimes are likely, then, to be *social imaginaries* (Section 3.3.1). I propose that considering what kind of social imaginaries end users hold about Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime means probing the taken-for-granted premises about the different aspects of the algorithmic visibility regime: the readability vector, the sight vector, the relations between these two vectors and, lastly, the normative dimension of this imaginary – what Brighenti (2010, p. 45) calls the "normative questions" of visibility regimes. Given my concern with ordinary citizens and power relations, these normative questions can be summarized as: do end users assume to be able to define how they are visibilized on Facebook? This second component is addressed empirically in Chapter 6, and refers to **SRQ 2: Which social imaginaries do end users hold of Facebook's**

algorithmic visibility regime?

3. **The Visibility Control Projects of Civic Voice Expressions**. Since being visibilized by others is a necessary, but insufficient condition for end users to have their civic voice (mis)recognized (Section 3.6.1), and since Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime changes the terms of this condition by rendering it uncertain (Section 3.6.2), end users might decide to engage in projects whose aim is to control the visibility of their civic voice expressions so as to have them heard: both recognized and not denigrated, invisibilised and distorted. (Whether "visibility" in this context means being seen/seeing or being read (or even reading) is an empirical problem, I suggest.) In this thesis, I am interested in the extent to which these visibility control projects (structured by the aforementioned social imaginaries of the visibility regime) are associated with the prefiguration and adjustments to end users' civic voice expressions (initially, structured by users' civic imaginaries). For these adjustments (or lack thereof) may give rise to specific relations of (mis)recognition, leading to transformations in end users' civic self-understandings – the processes of civic becoming the thesis intends to illuminate. This research investigates the nature of this potential association by looking into two kinds of projects to control the visibility of civic voice.

    a. **Visibility Expansion Projects.** End users might decide to increase the visibility of their civic voices on Facebook so as to have their voice heard as they intend it to be heard. The literature analysed in Section 3.2 provides evidence that, at least, activists have engaged in visibility quests, "optimizing" their voices "towards the algorithm" (Milan, 2018, p. 516). However, reflections on these "quests" by ordinary citizens regarding politics has been less well studied. Chapter 7 considers this possibility by addressing **SRQ 3.1: Do ordinary end users' attempt to expand the visibility of their civic voice expressions on Facebook? If so, is this attempt associated with how they articulate these expressions?**

    b. **Visibility Reduction Projects**. Alternatively, end users might attempt to decrease the visibility of their civic voices to avoid suffering misrecognitions from other actors. The research reviewed in Sections 3.2.1 and 3.5.2 shows that end users often employ interface functionalities (e.g. "Privacy Settings"), coded expressions and "self-

censorship",[35] to realize this sort of visibility control. It is unclear whether these same findings apply to civic voice expressions of ordinary citizens acting on datafied platforms. Chapter 8 probes this by addressing **SRQ 3.2: Do ordinary end users' attempt to reduce the visibility of their civic voice expressions on Facebook? If so, is this attempt associated with how they articulate these expressions?**

The answers to these two questions inform my discussion of how these attempts to control one's visibility on Facebook are associated with the prefiguration of end users' processes of civic becoming. The analysis of how visibility control projects are related to the prefiguration of civic voice *per se* is undertaken in Chapter 9, when my empirical findings are re-examined with the objective of advancing conceptual insights.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter tackled the challenge of formulating the conceptual framework that guides the remainder of this thesis. The lexicon emerges out of a discussion about what citizenship is and ought to be, and which structural elements shape the practice of civic self-representation that constitutes the citizen. After positioning the thesis within non-naturalist approaches to citizenship, the chapter developed a conceptual foundation (social practices) which, combined with elements from other theoretical traditions (recognition theory, critical studies of datafication and visibility), suggests two central concepts: civic voice and algorithmic visibility regime, to account for the practice of citizenship and the exertion of datafication power by Facebook, respectively. In considering how the latter modifies the conditions for the expression of the former, the conceptual framework delimits three components that guide the analysis in this thesis: *the schematization of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime*; *the social imaginaries of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime*; and the *visibility control projects of civic voice expressions* (what encompasses both *visibility expansion projects* and *visibility reduction projects*).

Before exploring the sub research questions proposed to examine these components, I explain the methodological choices employed to investigate these issues empirically, in the context of the Brazilian crisis. This is the topic of Chapter 4.

[35] Since civic voices are inherently prefigured, I avoid such terms as "self-censorship", which tend to assume that voice is inherently free and only transformed accidently by external factors.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1. Introduction

An important idea, discussed Section 3.6.3, is that the relative opacity of platforms' datafication operations may play a generative – rather than restrictive – role in end users' abilities to imagine these processes and act upon these imaginings. In casting new light on end users' potential agency, in this thesis, this possibility works as an epistemological stepping stone. Assuming it is possible for individuals, somehow, to reflect on dataveillance and algorithmic decision-making, this chapter suggests means of accessing those reflections and their potential consequences for people's civic voices by examining *their descriptions* of those reflections and the potential consequences for these civic voices.

This chapter is organized as follows. First, I discuss what a constructivist epistemology for the analysis of end users' understandings of/reactions to datafication operations might entail, followed by my choice of a qualitative method (in this study, in-depth semi-structured interviews) to address my research questions. I then justify and explain the data collection and analysis procedures. Third, I discuss some ethical issues that emerged during the planning and execution of this study, with a view to considering how my responses to these issues informed my methodological decisions.

4.2. Epistemological Position

This section explains the constructivist epistemological position from which the thesis addresses the research questions presented in Section 3.6.3.

It is useful to recall that, as argued in Section 3.6.1, datafication operations are based on computational methods to generate, analyse and act upon digital data. In the past 20 years, many of these methods have been adapted by social scientists and there is a robust body of academic and critical work on the techniques, efficacy and ethics related to the collection and analysis of data produced on and through the Internet. Some dub these "digital methods" (see Venturini, Bounegru, Gray, & Rogers, 2018 for a critical assessment). The realization of datafication's dubious social consequences has inspired multiple approaches that develop and apply similar methods to uncover the negative consequences of datafication (see FATML, 2019).

The non-naturalist assumptions underpinning my conceptual framework, suggest an approach that may be framed, broadly, as constructivist, and the use of a qualitative method (next section).[36] In this approach, the emphasis is on how "the dynamic contours" of mundane social reality are "put together and assigned meaning" by individuals, able to reflect on and narrate this contextual generative process (Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti, & McKinney, 2008, p. 3; Flick, 2009, p. 15; Hammersley, 1992, p. 165). The employment of this approach in this thesis is made conceptually possible by the definition of datafication as involving both computational and reflective processes (Section 3.5.2).

One way of translating this ontology into an epistemological concept is to argue that, from the end user's standpoint, datafication operations are not something that "might be knowable" by opening a metaphorical "black box" (Bucher, 2018, p. 44; Ananny & Crawford, 2016). Rather, they are "*known unknowns* [emphasis added]", which end users "encounter" through practical, contextual and reflective engagements (Bucher, 2018, p. 62; Couldry et al., 2016). People, then, may develop understandings about datafication operations "despite not knowing exactly what they are or how they work" (Bucher, 2018, p. 64), which, likely, will play a part in the structuring of their social practices – including civic voice. I understand this perspective as both phenomenological *and* material (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, pp. 33-34). That is, these "reflexive relationships" are themselves shaped by the fixed forms and means whereby datafication becomes perceivable. In particular, as suggested in Section 3.6.3, the various forms of opacity that surround dataveillance and algorithmic decision-making may be understood not as an obstacle to carrying out empirical research on people's reflective relationships to them, but as a key element to be investigated empirically.

4.3. Method: The Choice of In-Depth Interviews

In this perspective, it becomes possible to employ "well-known methods" to research the new methods employed by datafication (Kubitschko & Kaun, 2016, p. 315). Inspired by previous research on similar topics (e.g. Rader & Gray, 2015; Bucher, 2017; Eslami et al., 2015; Eslami et al., 2016; DeVito et al., 2018), I opt for what Kvale (2007, pp. 7-8) describes as the in-depth, "semi-structured, life world interview", whose purpose is "obtaining descriptions of the life word of the interviewees with respect to interpreting the described phenomena". Through constructivist lenses, this kinds of interview is a "contextual, improvised and performative" practice that "reconstructs" the world (Denzin, 2001, p. 26) by making certain elements of it visible and, thus, analysable (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3; cf. Silverman, 2001). Rather than being considered a "miner", as the naturalistic traditions would put it,

[36] This is not to say that all non-naturalist research is qualitative (Bevir & Blakely, 2019, p. 95).

the interviewer is likened to a “traveller”, venturing into participants’ stories, with a world view and experience that shape which journey should be embarked upon and how such an allegorical trip should be reported (Kvale, 2007, pp. 10-20).

Also, I follow Flick’s (2008, pp. 27-32) proposal that a practical step towards enhancing the quality of research is recognition of the notion of “diversity”, which can be applied to different project stages such as development of the interview guide and sampling. Here, validity is understood as related to the researcher’s capacity to make accurate claims about the world “on the basis of the adequacy of the evidence offered in support of them” (Hammersley, 1992, p. 69). An analysis of in-depth interview data does not yield broadly generalizable insights, but it can enable the researcher to discuss their potential generalizability, especially as a guide to future research (Flyvbjerg, 2001). My methodological choice implies other limitations. Common to any self-reporting method, the information derived from interviews is limited by the interviewees’ likely need to be regarded favourably by the interviewer. Thus, their personal and contextual inhibitions and, necessarily, flawed memory can result in responses that are exaggerated, selective and incomplete. I made every attempt to minimize some of these aspects in my research design, but they are factors which must be considered.

Despite these limitations, from four alternative methods considered, in-depth individual interviews were deemed ideal to answer my research questions. Although asking participants to write *personal diaries* could have generated the kind of data I needed, even proponents of this method accept that the difficulties related to persuading participants to make regular diary entries are costly and make this method better suited to research, such as qualitative longitudinal studies, where other methods are even less feasible (Alaszewski, 2006). I discarded f*ocus groups* because some of the topics of interest for this research might be perceived by participants as too private or as socially undesirable to be shared collectively. *Participant observation* might have helped to circumvent participant filters and allowed observation of their Facebook practices. However, while all forms of ethnography entail some level of concealment by informants, ultimately, Facebook’s visibility control functionalities could have rendered completely unobservable the issues in which I was interested. However, I conducted an initial observation in order to customize my interview protocol (see next section). Last, at the time of the fieldwork, I considered there was little existing information on how people imagine and act in relation to Facebook’s algorithmic visibility regime, allowing the design of a *survey* – although it is hoped that the findings from this thesis research may be informative in this regard (see Section 10.4).

4.4. Research Design

The Brazilian crisis both inspired me to investigate how Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime structured everyday civic voices and presented a peculiarly relevant empirical background for such an investigation. Given the discussion of the Brazilian context in Chapter 2, here, I do not provide further detail on the rationale for my decision to focus on Brazil and on Facebook. In this section, I describe the research design including the decisions involved in operationalizing the conceptual framework to formulate the interview questions, and the data collection and analysis

4.4.1. Operationalizing the Research Questions

Operationalization of the main research question (**How does Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime shape the civic voice of ordinary end users on the platform?**) involved the construction of an interview protocol. This stage was influenced by the premise that, since the thesis concerns the phenomenon of in/visibility and its civic ramifications, the possibility that participants might be unaware of Facebook's algorithmic systems should not procedurally be avoided. Rather, I remained open to any explanation participants might propose concerning how in/visibility works on Facebook. This departs from some previous interview-based works on end users and datafication, which assumed that prior methodological interventions were needed to ensure participants knew about or, at least, were sensitized to algorithmic systems.[37] Thus, the interview protocol does not use technical terms such as "algorithm" and "data", which could have confused participants and resulted in their withholding information because of a lack of awareness that some of their imaginaries and practices are related to "algorithms" and/or "data".

These terms, also, risked being understood by interviewees as signals of what I, an alleged media expert living in an affluent city (London), was expecting to hear (my positionality is detailed in Section 4.5.1 below). In this case, participants could become self-conscious and fail to disclose relevant information and/or become eager to please me, increasing the possibility of artificial descriptions. Thus, the protocol adopted an in/visibility vocabulary.[38] Another terminology choice was the use of the phrase "political participation" rather than "civic voice"; I deemed the former more easily understood than the latter. I did not anticipate that participants' potentially distinct understandings of "participation" and the "political" would be problematic since this study is not concerned with investigating differences between distinct forms of "participation" or particular meanings of "political". In addition, I used the terms "social media" or "Facebook", which are more typically used

[37] Examples: Bucher (2017) selected people who, previously, had talked publicly about algorithms; Eslami et al. (2016, 2017) used a code device to de-algorithmize participant's Facebook newsfeeds.
[38] Rader and Gray (2015) inspired the wording of some of my interview questions.

in Brazil than “platform”. Lastly, all the questions in the interview guide included the word “politics”. Not because I believed that Facebook uses a particular visibility logic with regard to politics, but because I expected that participants’ reflections on the existence or not of this logic would be a potentially interesting aspect.

There were two versions of the interview protocol (see Appendices 1 and 2). The first was produced in September 2016 and contained 16 questions. In addition to the questions, it also asked participants to access their Facebook profiles to give me examples of the practices they described. To refine this protocol, I conducted pilot interviews in London, between October and November 2016. From among acquaintances and friends, I recruited three Brazilian individuals who self-described as politically engaged on Facebook. I explained that these were pilot interviews, assured them of the confidentiality of our conversation and that they could call a halt to the interview at any time. Based on a review of the transcripts obtained, I concluded that: (1) the interviews would benefit from an initial narrative question, which would encourage them to talk freely about how they exert their civic voice on Facebook; (2) the protocol contained too many questions and that this hindered my ability to probe important points further; (3) there was some wording that, at some moments, was inducing certain answers and precluding others (e.g. “What do you do to *hide*?”, which implied a negative practice and, possibly, would stop the interviewee describing forms of invisibilization not necessarily negative); (4), the sequence of questions began and ended abruptly and elicited some repetitive responses (e.g. there was a question about respect and another about listening, although both questions, essentially, were about civic recognition). However, confirming my expectations, my interviewees seemed not to need to be prodded to talk about algorithmic visibility; they had developed a vocabulary of their own to describe datafication operations, as Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 will demonstrate.

I then revamped the interview protocol. The second (and final) version began with an explanation by me about the project and the forthcoming interview, and the distribution to the interviewee of a consent form (see Section 4.4.4 below). The first main question (“Could you explain how you participate politically on social media?”) was not linked directly to a specific research problem. Rather, it was aimed at building trust and making the interviewee feel comfortable in the interview setting. I expected, also, that this first question would help me to elicit more information about the participant – such as occupation, age and political ideology. The number of questions was reduced to 11 and the wording of the questions was refined to be more neutral and open. For reasons that will become clear in Section 4.5.2, I abandoned the request for the interviewees to access their

Facebook accounts. I included a final question ("How have your political activities on social media changed your offline life?") which, although not related directly to one of the thesis research questions, was intended to elicit a final, further reflection that would enhance the value of the interview experience for participants and prepare them for the debriefing.

I also changed the organization of the interview protocol. Rather than breaking down each of the research questions into discrete series of interview questions (as in the first version of the protocol), the concept of algorithmic visibility regime was used to guide the operationalization of the conceptual framework (in particular, Section 3.6.3) into interview questions. This was because the two vectors of visibility regime – sight and readability – give rise to at least three potential real-life event types about which end users could be asked: (1) seeing the news feed and, in particular, the news feed; (2) being seen by others in the news feed and having actions read by other actors, in particular the platform; and (3) being recognized/misrecognized (or, simply, being heard), which originates in the second event kind (being seen/read). Appendix 3 presents a cross-tabulation of the components of the conceptual framework, the research questions and the interview questions. This appendix demonstrates that some interview questions provided data related to more than one sub research question, thus, operating as a form of in-method triangulation through enhancement of diversity in data production (Flick, 2008, p. 55). The way each sub research question was translated into the interview questions is described below.

- **SRQ 1: How do ordinary end users schematize Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime?**

The data were elicited through three interview questions, all focused on the notion of schematization (thus the wording: "How did you *discover*…"). These sought to push participants to reflect on the experiences informing their conclusions about what defines how they see what they see in terms of politics (event 1), who can see/read their posts/comments about politics (event 2) and why certain posts/comments about politics are more visible than others (event 3). If their answers did not explain which areas of reality underpinned their schematization, probing questions were posed.

- **SRQ 2: Which social imaginaries do ordinary end users hold of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime?**

In Section 3.6.3, I posited that the notion of social imaginary can be captured by analysing narratives *and* practices. I approached this through two kinds of interview questions. The first comprises attempts to elicit some form of personal explanation about the criteria that define who can visibilize whom on Facebook (events 1,2 and 3). I anticipated that some individuals could find it

difficult to verbalize what they imagine, even when asked directly about this. Thus, I triangulated the responses to the first kind of questions with the responses to a second kind – related to participants' *practical* attempts to become more or less (event 3) visible on the platform.

- **SRQ 3.1: Do ordinary end users' attempt to expand the visibility of their civic voice expressions on Facebook? If so, is this attempt associated with how they articulate these expressions?**

This sub-question was addressed through four interview questions. I asked participants about what, if anything, they *do* to allow their political activity to be seen by more people on the platform (event 2). As the language indicates, I was seeking accounts of their actions. At the same time, these attempts are linked to expectations of civic (mis)recognition (event 3), which was probed through two questions: one aiming to elicit general reflections about being heard on Facebook (which might or might not be related to visibility expansion projects); and a second, which sought to prompt reflections about the specific relationship between being seen and being recognized. Because Facebook's functionalities, which allow users to define partially what they see or not, might also affect how they are seen (e.g. the "Block" button), I included a question on these actions.

- **SRQ 3.2: Do ordinary end users' attempt to reduce the visibility of their civic voice expressions on Facebook? If so, is this attempt associated with how they articulate these expressions?**

The last sub-question was treated similarly to SRQ 3.1 and was investigated by four interview questions. The language of the first question was modified intentionally to include the possibility of inaction. Thus, instead of asking what they did to become less visible, I asked: "Have you ever changed your political activities on social media because these activities might be visible to others?".

The protocol combined traits from different interview approaches, as indicated by Kvale (2007, pp. 72-76). The first question was "narrative related", that is, was focused on the interviewees' own understanding of their stories of expressing civic voice on Facebook; questions about practices were "factual", inasmuch as they allowed me to elicit descriptions of what participants do; questions on social imaginaries could be described as typical of "conceptual interviews", in which participants are expected to reflect on and explain their understanding of certain phenomena.

Finally, while all participants were asked the same set of core questions, I used initial observation of participants' public Facebook profiles to include specific questions for some

interviewees (e.g. why the participant wore a hood in his profile picture, or why the participant had included incorrect city information in her profile).

4.4.2. Data Collection: Sampling and Recruitment

Having designed the interview protocol, I constructed my interviewee sample. The first step was operationalization of the notion of "ordinary people". Building on the discussion in Section 3.2, an "ordinary citizen" was defined as an individual who: (1) had never participated in a political organization, including a social movement or a political party; (2) did not identify him or herself as an activist[39]; and (3) before the onset of the Brazilian crisis had little or no previous experience expressing herself politically in a sustained manner. Also, participants were also expected to self-identify as participating intensively in political activities on Facebook. All these criteria were used in the recruitment ads, made explicit when I asked participants to indicate other participants, and repeated at the first contact/meeting.

The second step was deciding how to construct the participants sample. In line with the qualitative nature of this study, I used a nonprobability sampling procedure, which included decisions about sampling frame and sampling technique. One issue related to the sampling frame was the generic nature of the idea of "ordinary citizen". I adopted the "maximum variation" principle, aimed at "obtain[ing] information about the significance of various circumstances for case process and outcome" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 79). Given the characteristics of Brazil's political organization and the nature of the country's crisis (Chapter 2), I sought a sample that would provide as much variation as possible in relation to four individual "circumstances": income, race, gender, and political ideology. Since I judged that certain professional circumstances would allow some individuals to have disproportionately more powerful voices, I filtered out mainstream media journalists and "digital influencers".[40] I assumed, also, that not all interviewees would be equally "ordinary" in terms of Facebook. Some were likely to have hundreds of followers while others might have thousands. Also, my fieldwork was mainly conducted in the city of São Paulo, since it is both my hometown (an important practical advantage) and was the epicentre of the Brazilian crisis.

In relation to my sampling technique, I decided to combine snowballing and purposive sampling. Recruitment began in November 2016, in London, with a Facebook ad (see Figure 4.1). I created a Facebook page on the research project and used Facebook's services to "boost" a post,

[39] Interestingly, this procedure did not stop some individuals from referring to their political activities online as "activism", which I suggest attests to the inherent fluidity of the term.
[40] By "digital influencer" I mean individuals who profit from their activity on datafied platforms.

targeting adults (over 20 years old), living in São Paulo who demonstrated some "interest" in certain politicians (see example in Figure 4.2 below).[41] In addition, I joined multiple Facebook groups related to Brazilian politics and posted 47 recruiting messages (see example in Figure 4.3 below). Although the ad, presumably, was seen by thousands of users (how many saw the posts within the groups was unclear), only five individuals said they were interested in participating. Based on successive recommendations from these initial five participants, I recruited 14 interviewees. The remaining participants were recruited through six initial acquaintances who suggested interviewees.

By the end of January 2017, I had interviewed 19 people; however, the sample was too homogenous, composed mainly of people similar to myself: White, male, progressive, upper middle-class. I changed my tactic and, in place of snowballing, I employed purposive sampling to add variation to the participants in my sample. I tried to recruit participants who self-identified as non-White, not male nor cisgender, conservative, and from a poor background. The fieldwork concluded in March 2017 when I sensed that data collection had reached "theoretical saturation", that is, the point when "no new insights are likely to result from continued [efforts]" (Low, 2008, p. 779). I ultimately achieved a sample of 47 individuals (see Appendix 4), whom I interviewed in São Paulo and two neighbouring cities, Campinas and Jundiaí.

It is important to highlight some general ways in which the sample appears to have been skewed. First, geographically, by focusing on the region of São Paulo, the sample did not capture other views on the crisis which likely exist in poorer areas of Brazil. Also, people identifying as politically engaged might be more likely to take extreme political positions (Pew Research Centre, 2014). This sampling limitations imposes restrictions on the generalizability of my results (Section 10.4).

[41] This strategy was justified by my interest in Facebook end users and its relative inexpensiveness (see Forgasz, Tan, Leder, & Mcleod, 2017). While micro-targeting has questionable societal consequences, my usage of it did not engender perceivable ethical concerns.

Figure 4.1: Print screen of Facebook recruiting post, November 2016. Source: Author.[42]

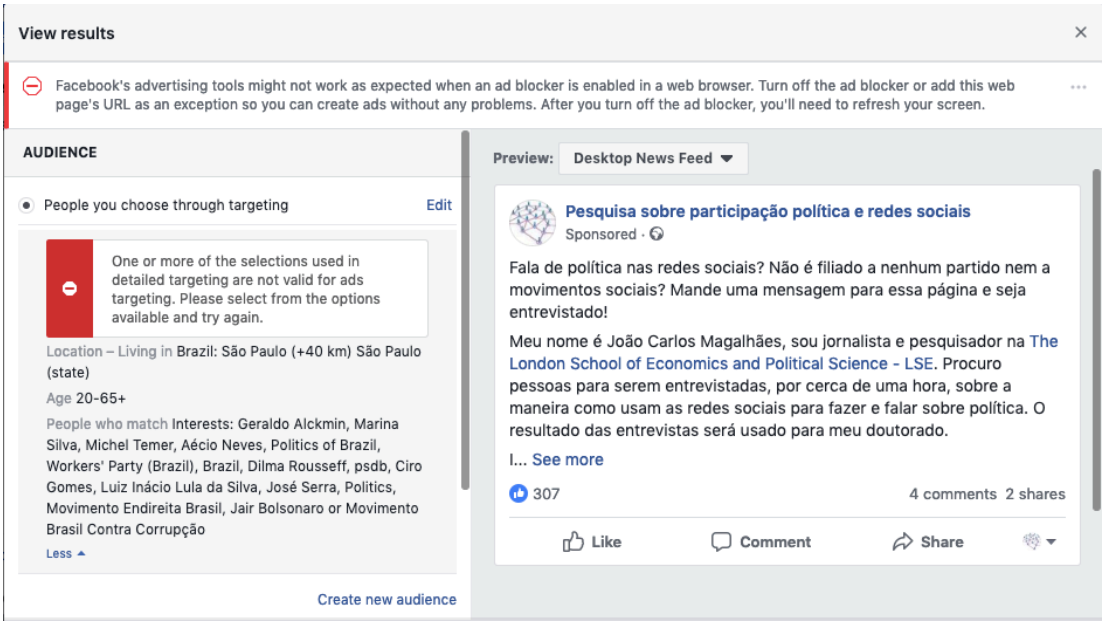

Figure 4.2: Microtargeting panel of author's Facebook page. Source: Author.

[42] See Appendix 6 for a translation of the basic text enclosed in Figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3.

Figure 4.3.: Print screen of a recruitment ad, posted in a Facebook group. Source: Author.

4.4.3. Data collection: Conducting the Interviews

The interviews were recorded. They began with a briefing, lasted between 45 and 130 minutes (75 minutes on average) and ended with a debriefing and a thank you to interviewees for their participation. I also asked some what they thought of the experience and discussed, informally, some aspects of the Brazilian crisis. My interview questions were intended to promote a fluid conversation. After listening to participants' answers to the first question, which, commonly, resulted in lengthy descriptions of their political involvement on Facebook, I tended to take a more active stance, asking probing questions (such as "what do you mean by this?" or "can you give me an example?").

4.4.4. Informed Consent

To allow participants to assess the possible risks and benefits entailed by this study, and to ensure their consent to participation, participants were informed repeatedly about "the overall purpose" and "the main features of the design" of the research (Kvale, 2007, p. 27). They were briefed about this: (1) during the recruitment process; (2) before the interviews began; and (3) on the consent form. During the debriefing, participants were again told that the project was about political participation on Facebook during the crisis, that their descriptions would be completely anonymized and that they could withdraw from the research at any time without providing a reason. Aware of the suspicions around research, heightened by the then current climate of distrust, I gave participants the

online address of my profile in LSE's Media and Communications Department, which contained more information about me. In the interview briefing, interviewees were given two hard-copies of the consent form (see Appendix 5) and were asked to read it carefully before deciding to sign. They kept a copy and I filed a copy. Before these face to face meetings, I asked participants, in writing (via email or WhatsApp messages), if, before our conversation, I could find them and add them on Facebook as "friends" to allow me to observe their posts and profile information and customize my interview protocol. All of them agreed to my doing this.

4.4.5. Data Analysis

After transcribing the interviews,[43] I embarked on the analysis. I discarded narrative analysis and discourse analysis (since my interest was in participants' actions and ideas, not their personal stories[44] or discourses as such), and chose to employ thematic analysis. This technique is understood here as a method of "pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis" (Fereday & Cochrane, 2006, p. 82) through the "careful reading and re-reading of the data" (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258).

It took some time to understand how to make sense of the narratives I had listened to during the fieldwork. Initially, I tried to implement theory-driven analysis, but found that the concepts I was using were too vague to establish specific categorizations. After working for some weeks, I abandoned this strategy and adopted a mixed approach: partially deductive (general themes originating from my theory-driven research questions) and partially inductive (categories and sub-categories developed from the ground up). This work was neither step-by-step nor formulaic. Over time, I learnt to embrace the process's unavoidably messiness and iterativeness. Despite this non-linearity, the analysis included some general stages, inspired largely by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. **Habituation to the data.** Before engaging in systematic analysis, I familiarized myself with the data by reading the hard copies of the transcriptions and making some initial notes. This led to the decision to use the sub research questions as the main themes.

2. **Developing and applying the codebook.** Using NVivo software and my initial notes, I developed a basic set of categories and sub-categories (i.e. a thematic codebook) from a

[43] Interviews were transcribed in full, either by myself and a Brazilian company; those transcribed by the company were checked by me for accuracy.
[44] This is not to say that, during the interviews, personal stories did not arise. However, my focus on actions and understandings led me to not privilege the *narrative nature* of these stories.

subsample of 15 interviews. I applied this codebook to the remaining 32 transcriptions, making necessary adjustments and additions as necessary. Each theme involved certain interpretative logics:

a. **Schematization of the algorithmic visibility regime (SRQ 1):** the categories described broader processes/sources of information (e.g. "Newsfeed Experiences"); subcategories referred to specific examples of these processes/sources (e.g. "I inferred dataveillance from Facebook's 'Memory' posts"). I coded, essentially, the explicit explanations given by interviewees in response to my questions about how they had developed certain understandings about the definition of who can visibilize whom on Facebook.

b. **Social Imaginaries of the algorithmic visibility regime (SRQ 2).** Categories described what I initially termed imagined "principles" of the regime (e.g. "principle of uncertainty"), which, over time, would become simply "social imaginaries"; mid-level subcategories described to which vector of the visibility regime the coded text alluded (e.g. "Surveillance"); lower-level subcategories detailed the assumption which could be inferred or was made explicit by the coded text (e.g. "Facebook practices of dataveillance"). Based on my theoretical definition of social imaginaries, my interpretative strategies involved making sense of which assumptions about the visibility regime seemed to underpin my interviewees' explanations, guesses and theories about how Facebook works, *and* their practical attempts to become less or more visible. In relation to the latter, my work, to some extent, was that of a reverse engineer, querying the coded texts with: what which assumption about Facebook algorithmic visibility regime needed to be in place to make that action at least possible? See Figure 4.4 below for a graphic illustration of this theme's categories and subcategories.

c. **Visibility control projects of civic voice expressions (SRQ 3.1 and SRQ 3.2)**. In addition to coding each visibility control-oriented action in relation to its alleged goal, that is "expand" (SRQ 3.1) or "reduce" (SRQ 3.2) the visibility of one's civic voice, I engaged in a reverse engineering interpretation as well. I attempted to derive not only which assumption about Facebook's visibility regime the coded action seemed to depend upon but also which understanding of the recognition/misrecognition of the civic

voice the narrated action was linked to (e.g. "I want to draw attention to my political project"). This led to a cascade of hundreds of subcategories which were substantially simplified in the next phase of the analysis. Due to the format of my questions, I focused on descriptions of their visibility control projects, which, arguably, entailed the core element of these projects' creation.

3. **Refining the coding, planning the chapters.** Based on this initial full coding of all the interview transcripts, the themes and their respective coded excerpts were translated into Word files. While reviewing the texts within these files, some codes were abandoned, merged or had their names changed. Also, I decided not to use some of the material that was coded in the second stage, since I realized it was neither helpful for answering the sub-questions, nor did it contradict any of the observations and arguments based on the material that is included in the analysis which follows. These exclusions related to themes concerning the "non-political consequences of Facebook voice exertion" and "offline consequences of Facebook voice exertion". This material may provide a resource for future work.

4. **Reporting the data, producing an analytical narrative.** My strategy in the four empirical chapters is in line with Braun and Clark's (2006, p. 22) suggestion to choose "particularly vivid examples" to produce "a concise, coherent, logical, nonrepetitive, and interesting account of the story" based on my data. The data presentation followed some guidelines. First, interviewees were assigned not codes (e.g. "participant 36"), but rather personal descriptors (e.g. name and profession). This was not because their jobs were necessarily relevant to my interpretation of their narrative – although if they were, I made this explicit. This choice was intended to humanize participants and to enhance the fluidity of the text. Second, if they were of analytical significance, other elements of individuals' personal contexts, such as ideological positioning, race, gender, income, political experiences, for example, were provided. Third, I used terms such as "some" and "many" to refer to the prevalence of certain patterns in my interviews. However, given the qualitative nature of my research and my relatively small sample in this context, this prevalence is intended only to signal relatively how often a narrative occurred. For the same reason, I usually avoided providing the number of participants who answered some questions in certain ways. Fourth, while in Chapters 7 and 8, I refer to participants' visibility control *projects*, my analysis in these Chapter is limited to the practical realization of these projects (see Section 3.6.3).

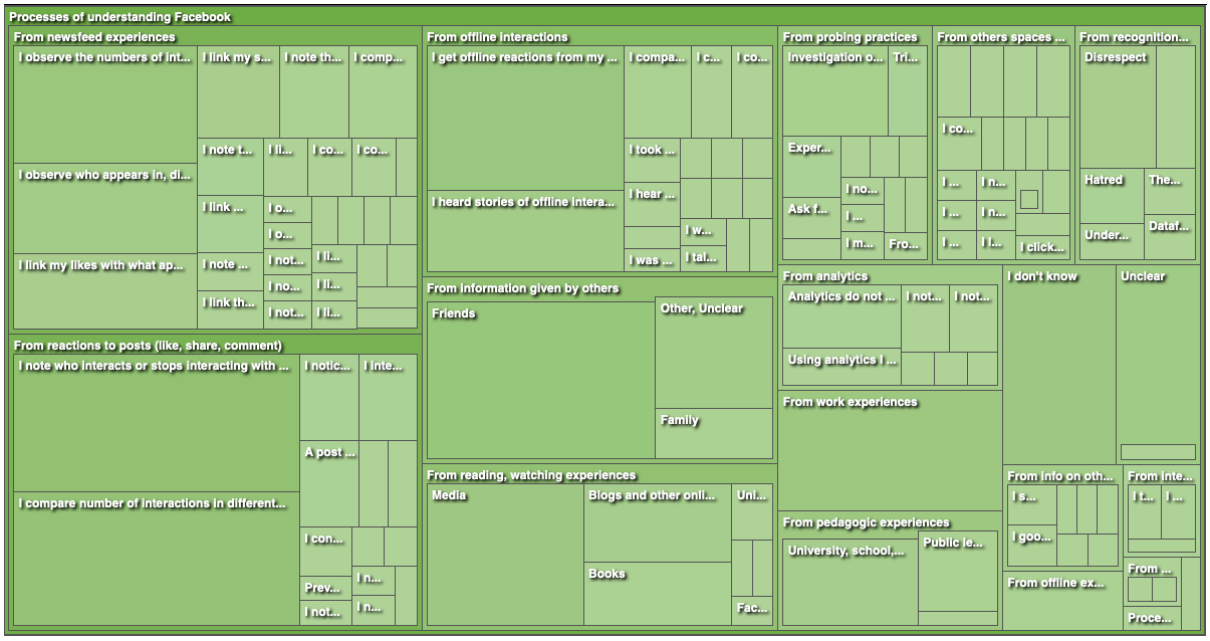

Figure 4.4: Illustration of Theme 1 categories and subcategories. Sources: NVivo software, Author.

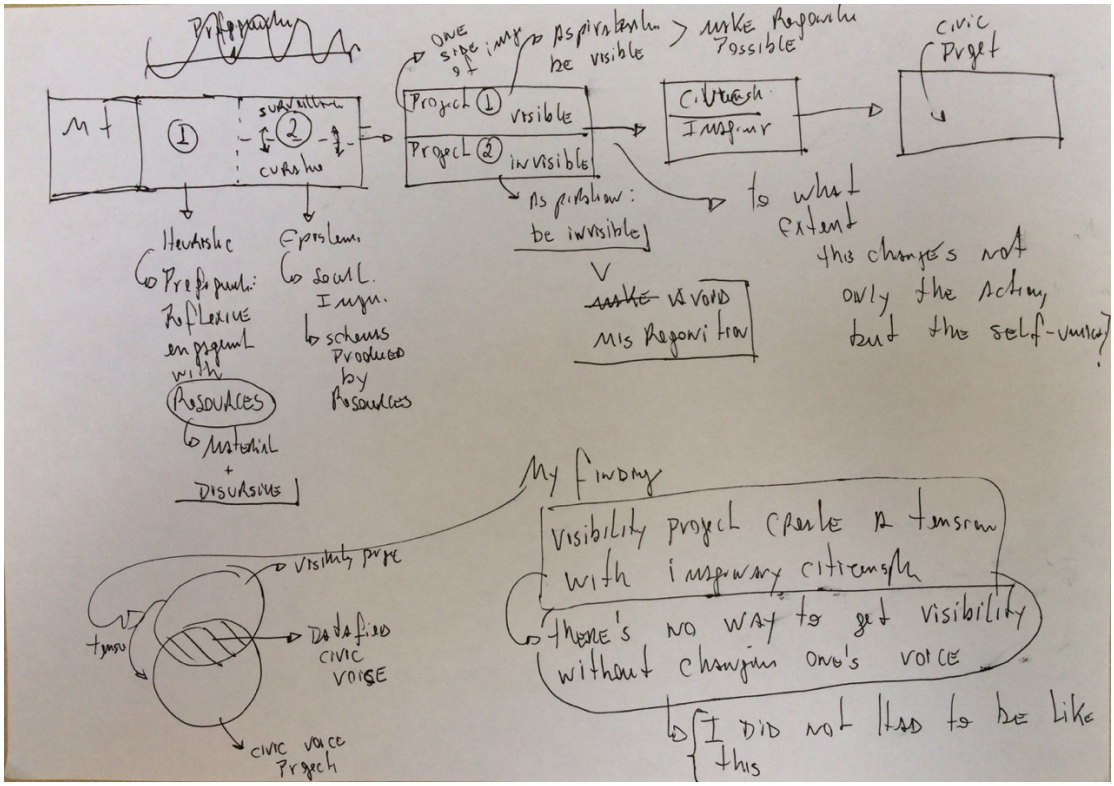

Figure 4.5: Depiction of an attempt to graphically systematize findings. Source: Author.

Lastly, I used new terms to designate my empirical findings, that is, the patterns I found in the interviewees' descriptions in relation to my sub research questions (e.g. "accurate responses", "readability as eavesdropping", "tactical aggressions", "profile disguise" – see Appendix 7, which summarizes these themes/empirical findings, locate them in thesis and indicate on which concept

they are based and which conceptual insight they inspired). These thematic labels play an important role in the thesis, as I employed them to organize the empirical Chapters 5 to 8. Yet, they should not be understood as conceptual insights, which are developed only in Chapter 9. In this analytical chapter, my procedure involved the re-reading of the interview excerpts (hereafter, simply "excerpts") used in the empirical chapters, the literature discussed in Chapter 3 and various hand-written attempts to systematize my findings (see example in Figure 4.5. above).

4.5. Ethics

The bellicose political climate in Brazil proved not only to be a central concern of the thesis but also a frame that shaped the ethical conditions for its realization. These conditions are discussed below from two perspectives: positionality and reflexivity, and individual harm (Allmark et al., 2009; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005; Kvale, 2007, pp. 24-30).

4.5.1. Positionality and Reflexivity

A continuous effort was made to reflect on ways that my personal context could shape how I designed and executed this research. This aspect was particularly important in my relationship with interviewees. I was aware that my position as a White, male and cisgender PhD student, living in an affluent foreign city, could increase the power asymmetries that naturally permeate the interview process. Furthermore, I assumed that some of the questions in my protocol were about actions that could be understood as being morally charged and socially undesirable – particularly in the context of the Brazilian crisis. For instance, some people could be ashamed of admitting to be afraid of not saying what they wanted to say on Facebook; conversely, participants could be reluctant to admit that they intentionally shaped their voices to become more visible. In view of these possibilities, I told participants that the interview was a conversation, not a test of what they knew about Facebook or about what kinds of citizens they were; there were no "right" or "wrong" answers, I assured them. While interviewees would necessarily have to deal with some sort of pressure to "perform" for me, being open about this pressure was expected to incentivize them to be as frank as possible. Put another way, by highlighting my interviewees' autonomy, I hoped to enhance the quality of the interview as well.

My own politically progressive views were another persistent reason for reflection. Due to the contentious climate in Brazil, I feared that, if conservative interviewees saw my positionings on Facebook, they would lose trust in me, question the intentions of my research, imagine an explicit ideological bias in my work or give up on the interview. My concerns were heightened because of my

institutional ties to the LSE. I knew that many conservative people in Brazil had bought into the fanciful notion that the world is "dominated" by Fabian socialism, the strand of non-revolutionary socialism fostered by some of LSE's founders (see Morgenstern, 2017). Moreover, progressive participants could develop erroneous expectations – for example, that my research was aimed at criticizing conservative users, which was not the case. Therefore, I took the decision to delete or hide all political posts from my Facebook profile – an action that, I was to learn from my interviewees' descriptions, was fairly common amongst those who feared professional repercussions from expressing their civic voices on the platform. Nevertheless, at the end of the interviews, many participants asked: "Which side are you on?". To these participants, I answered truthfully about my progressive views and explained that the thesis research was not designed to prove "my side" right or wrong. Ultimately, even those participants on the right of the ideological spectrum appeared to react sympathetically to my answers to their questions. I was careful, also, to ensure that my political views would not affect the rigour of my analysis. This meant being wary of any apparent emerging pattern related to the ideology of an interviewee.

4.4.2. Personal Harm

My efforts to avoid any personal harm to the participants involved, first, a preoccupation with confidentiality – especially, again, in the context of the crisis. In order to guarantee their privacy, digital records of the interviews were stored in password-protected digital environments; hard-copies of the transcriptions were kept safely in my house; the transcriptions do not mention participants' full names; the company that transcribed some of the interviews gave me the written assurance that all files would be destroyed immediately after I approved their work. When reporting the interviews, I use pseudonyms and, on some occasions, change biographical details (e.g. jobs) of some participants so as to make it very difficult for readers to identify them. I also took steps to minimize the chances of the actual interview being harmful, for example, by leading interviewees to relive distressing experiences. Before starting the conversation, interviewees were informed that they could stop at any point and should not feel obliged to answer any question; during the conversation, I was attentive to any signal that our interaction might be having a stressful impact. Lastly, I designed the interview protocol and conducted the conversations, in part, to provide participants with an enriching experience that allowed them to reflect critically on their own autonomy as citizens to express their voices on Facebook and about the Brazilian crisis. In the debriefing, I thanked and reminded them of how important it was to me that they accepted my invitation to share their views.

While the research entailed no significant risks to me, the interview protocol was adapted in response to a security risk common to anyone in Brazil. Since I do not have an office in São Paulo, I asked participants to suggest the place of the interview. Most chose public spaces. In the very first interview, as soon as I took my laptop out of my backpack, the interviewee said: "Are you sure you want to open this here [a shopping centre's food court]"? Although the environment was safe, a criminal could have observed our interaction and then followed me and stolen my computer. I deemed this unlikely, but just in case decided not to ask participants to log on to their profiles. However, many participants spontaneously showed me, on their mobile phones, examples of their practices.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter described my methodological decisions and procedures. After framing this study as a constructivist inquiry, I argued that in-depth interviews was the most suitable method to probe how Facebook end users make sense of, imagine and express their civic voice in relation to the platform's algorithmic visibility regime. I described the theoretical premises informing the operationalization of the conceptual framework into interview questions, the process employed to construct a sample of ordinary Brazilian end users to be interviewed, and the ways in which thematic analysis was adapted to examine the data produced during my fieldwork. Finally, I described how critical self-reflection on my own personal context and on my interviewees' well-being, vis-à-vis the Brazilian crisis, shaped some of the decisions discussed in the first sections of the chapter.

The succeeding empirical chapters discuss the results of the thematic analysis. Following the sequencing of the components of Section 3.6.3, the next Chapter (5) examines interviewees' descriptions of how they make sense of (schematize) Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime.

Chapter 5

The Schematization of Facebook's Algorithmic Visibility Regime

5.1. Introduction

Chapter 4 described and justified the epistemology and empirical methods applied in this thesis research. The present chapter begins the discussion of the empirical findings produced by the thematic analysis of my in-depth interviews with ordinary Brazilian end users of Facebook.

It examines, in particular, interviewees' descriptions of how they made sense of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime. Based on the phenomenological conceptualization of Emirbayer and Mische (1998), these sensemaking experiences were described in Section 3.3.2. as "schematizations". Schematizations depend on two basic processes, I suggested: paying attention to certain *areas of reality*, which allow for the identification of patterns ("types"). The primary site of Facebook's datafication power is precisely the end users' schematizations of the platform's algorithmic visibility regime, I proposed in Section 3.6.2. In materializing the interface as "personalized" and its infrastructure as "inscrutable", Facebook was said to attempt to orient end users' attention (their "systems of relevancies") to *certain* areas of reality so as to make them observe *certain* patterns. These directed schematizations were expected to lead end users to understand Facebook only as a naturally "relevant" interface, obscuring the very existence of the algorithmic visibility regime and possibly prompting them to act in ways that are conducive to the platform's business model, I suggested. At the same time, this attempt to direct the schematization of the regime is inherently indeterminate. If we are to understand how Facebook's visibility regime shapes civic voice, we should begin by this process – which is political but not necessarily civic. To do so, this chapter answers **SRQ 1: How do ordinary end users schematize Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime?**

My analysis of interviewees' answers to my questions on how they had arrived at some conclusions about their experiences on Facebook (see Section 4.4.5) suggests that all participants identified that there is an order defining who can visibilize whom on Facebook. My findings are presented according to the *macro areas of reality* to which participants apparently paid attention to in order to make sense of the platform's government of visibility, and the ways in which they come to identify *patterns* in these macro areas. The first part of the chapter examines a macro area of reality I named as *responses*; the second considers *information;* the third explores descriptions of a less common macro area – *probing actions*. In explaining my findings, I also mention the *micro* areas of reality that made their schematizations possible (for a list of them, see Table 9.1). It is important to

note that these schematizations are not conflicting. While all interviewees reported the ability to, *somehow*, make sense of this visibility regime, none of them described experiencing only one kind of schematization.

5.2. Responses

Interviewees reported that observing the way in which their news feeds and other end users *responded* to their actions, on and off the platform, allowed them to observe patterns that helped them to realize that *something* was making visibility definitions on Facebook. These patterns were noticed through two kinds of responses: those participants suggested to be *accurate* and those they suggested to be *inaccurate*.

5.2.1. 'Facebook Does It Very Well': Schematization Through Accurate Responses

To understand what I mean by *accurate responses*, consider first what I was told by Helena, a politically conservative law student, when I asked how she had discovered the rules governing the definition of visibility on Facebook:

> [5.1] I think it's my preference, what I see more often. I believe Facebook's filter does it very well, you know? My feed is mostly about politics, because it [the "filter"] knows that what I most look at now is politics. I love Carnival, and could be posting Carnival stuff, but it's been a couple of years that I stopped parading during Carnival. It's just logics, logics, I've never read anything about it to be honest.

When I asked her to detail what she meant by "logics", she took out her phone, opened the Facebook app, started browsing her news feed and said:

> [5.2] Here's an example. [Shows me her news feed; all posts are about politics]. You see, whenever I open my feed, [it's about] politics. So the logic is: what I see more often, [Facebook will show her more often]. When I used to parade in the Carnival, I did talk about politics, but not so openly. I knew it would be controversial [to talk about politics], that I would have to fight. So, until the moment I said, 'fuck off, this is my opinion and I will say it', it took a while. And at the time it was only Carnival in my feed. So, it's just a logical association, that's it, nothing else.

Helena's description of expressing her civic voice exemplifies a trajectory common to other interviewees. Before the Brazilian crisis, she commented about politics, "but not so openly". Having been "born and raised" in a *samba* school community,[45] as she had told me at another moment of our conversation, her interests were mostly related to the annual Carnival parade. However, since 2013,

[45] In Brazil, *samba* schools are community-based associations that compete in Carnival parades.

she had become increasingly political, which is reflected in how she expressed herself on Facebook ("this is my opinion and I will say it"). Then, something happened: her news feed, which had been "only [about] Carnival", became essentially about "politics". Facebook's "filter" (she did not use the term "algorithm") captured this change of "preference" "very well". It seems that Helena needed no formal information on computational systems in order to comprehend what was going on ("I've never read anything about it to be honest"); to her, the analogy between her actions and what she started seeing on her Facebook feed appeared self-evident ("just logics").

Olivia, a progressive editor, told me that she had sensed something similar:

> [5.3] [Before the crisis,] my circle of friends on Facebook didn't have so many feminists, and now it does, because we get to know each other, it widens the network. Sometimes I read it [her newsfeed] and, it's just women, only feminism here. Because we end up interacting more with ourselves and forming what we call a bubble.

Like Helena, Olivia seems to believe that Facebook is able to notice the change in her civic voice during the crisis. Up to a few years ago, she told me, most of what she saw on the platform was from friends made in high school, college or work. However, especially after 2013, Olivia started to post about feminism and to interact, on Facebook, with people with similar interests. She told me that this changed who she sees and who sees her on the platform. Her "network" had both expanded beyond its previous confines and became specified as a feminist "bubble". The notion of "bubble" was a prominent trope in the conversations with many of my participants and appears frequently in the succeeding chapters. (Section 9.3 conceptualizes the meaning of this term in the context of this study.)

Helena's and Olivia's accounts are illustrative of schematizations that involved comparing changes on their news feeds to broader transformations of their civic voice. Other interviewees described having noticed a similar connection, but in relation to more precise and not necessarily political aspects. Take the example of Lorena, a funk dancer, who mocked the naiveté of my question about whether something decides what she sees on Facebook:

> [5.4] No, it's the holy spirit who's doing it [laughter]. Of course not. There is some command there that I don't know how to explain, which is automatic. If I wrote on the Internet, it's there. No matter how privately, no matter where I am, this information is written somewhere, and it will reverberate in some way that I have no idea which way is. So, for example. I went to Rio in the past Carnival and I met a lot of dancers. Then I started adding many of these dancers on Facebook. I didn't 'like' any page or anything, but because I started to 'add' many dancers, several things related to the dance scene of Rio de Janeiro began to pop up [in her feed], and this led me to get to know a very nice project [in Rio], which I participated in. And it was the network that gave it to me. No one spoke about it, no one introduced it to me, I didn't know anyone who had

talked about this project. I started to search [about it], I started to follow [dancers], and I went back to Rio de Janeiro to participate in it and it was incredible.

Lorena talked about how Facebook's definition of what she sees in her feed (a "command" that is "automatic") is informed by some sort of all-seeing monitoring capacity ("No matter how privately, no matter where I am"). Whereas she does not seem to fully understand how it works ("I have no idea which way [it will reverberate]"), she does seem to believe that it works well. In her example, the "command" started to show her "things" about the "dance scene" of Rio de Janeiro (she is from São Paulo). Not because she "liked" certain posts, but simply because she added individuals from this "scene" to her network of Facebook "friends". One of these "things" was an "incredible" "project" in which she would not have participated if it were not for "the network", i.e. Facebook. It seems that although the platform might intrusively read her datafied actions, it also automatically generates connections that she appears to be happy about.

In the examples above, interviewees described observing how their news feeds responded to actions realized within the platform. Yet, these responses were often linked to other online spaces. Patricia, a nurse, told me that she "feels" that Facebook offers what she had already clicked on another website:

[5.5] It's very clear. I want to buy a, say, bread maker. Then I clicked there [an online shopping website], [and] then a lot of related advertising started to appear. I think Facebook is similar. Things about cooking – this also I see all the time [in her news feed]. So, it does not really change – cooking, feminism, things about Black culture [she is Black]. For instance, I'm a nurse but I don't 'like' things about [nursing] so I never see anything about it [on her feed].

Vicente, a theatre teacher, offered a very similar explanation for how he came to understand that he is monitored by Facebook.

[5.6] If I search something on the Internet then, later on, something appears [on Facebook] for me to buy, and it keeps showing up all the time. And everything is more and more intertwined. Google, which is interconnected to Facebook, which is interconnected to who knows what – everything can connect.

Theo, a lawyer, summarized well this sentiment:

[5.7] We can't think that everything works by chance or that everything is a mere coincidence. If you visit *Magazine Luiza*'s [webpage, a popular online retailer in Brazil], looking for a phone, it will appear on Face[book some] news about Magazine Luiza. There's a cause and consequence thing.

In these excerpts, Patricia, Vicente and Theo appear to be describing how they noticed that their actions outside Facebook (clicks, searches, browsing) provoked a response on Facebook (in the form of ads, or "news", in Theo's vocabulary). The association between algorithmic decision-making and dataveillance were described by them not as a shocking or unusual, but as an evident ("very clear"), logical ("cause and consequence") and quotidian ("it keeps showing all the time") fact of life. The association helps them to dismiss the unlikely possibility that the sameness of the content offered on other websites and in their news feeds is "mere coincidence", as Theo said. Indeed, as Patricia described, it is possible that these "causes and consequences" relationships between off Facebook actions and news feed become "very clear" precisely because (as Vicente described) they are shown "all the time".

These responses were depicted by other interviewees as *too* accurate. The following excerpt from my conversation with Amanda, who freelances as a video-maker, is illustrative of these accounts:

> [5.8] It's the *most common thing* [original emphasis], you search for a plane ticket and then you open your Facebook and you see [an ad]: 'Tickets to Chile'. It's quite creepy. I don't know, sometimes I think that someone is listening to my Facebook inbox messages. I don't know, I think they have this… I think they monitor [me], not sure. I don't know how [it works], man. It has to involve an algorithm. I don't know, I don't know. Conspiracy theory, maybe? It should involve that thing, the algorithm, that you click on [something on] Google, then the YouTube is also connected, everything is networked. You see suggestions on Facebook and YouTube.

Consider, too, what I was told by Artur, a documentarist:

> [5.9] Another day a very surreal thing happened on Facebook, I was absurdly scared. I was talking to my dad over Skype, in a private chat, and I told my dad I was, 'Dad', I told him, 'I want to use solar energy in my house, what you think?' and such. Five minutes later, I log on Facebook and see a solar energy [panel] advertisement. I said, damn... If I had googled, in Google, I don't know, it would be more [explainable]. But I hadn't searched. I had thought, talked to my dad in a private chat and it popped up. I said, fuck, it is too much of a coincidence.

Could it be only "coincidence" that, after searching for a plane ticket on Google, Facebook displayed to Amanda ads for tickets to the same destination? That the platform showed in Artur's news feed an ad for the solar panel he had been discussing with his father on Skype? Similar to Theo, accepting the coincidence hypothesis seemed illogical to them. Amanda and Artur appeared to believe that s*omething* must be guessing – in a worryingly accurate manner – what they were interested in. However, they were uncertain what this element was and how exactly it worked. *Maybe* it is "that thing, the algorithm", which operates in an environment where "everything is networked", pondered Amanda. Another possibility was that someone might be "listening" to her chats – or would this be a

"conspiracy theory"? Artur's quote demonstrates a similar concern. He even wonders if Facebook planted some sort of audio recording device in his phone.[46]

A comparable self-doubt was reported by Lucia, an actress. She explained that she came to realize that Facebook was secretly recording her actions within the platform through a Facebook Memory[47] video that celebrated her Facebook "friendship" with her partner:

> [5.10] And [the video message] is like, 'hey, you two had a great time', and it showed photos and stuff, [and it says]: 'you 'liked' each other thousands of times'. Then you say: A-ha! So, they *are* there, there *is* something there that calculates how many 'likes' you give to that person, or that person [gives] to you [original emphasis]. I don't think it's a person who observes, I'm not good at technology, but it's a Facebook system, a program scheduled to do that. It must be [laughter]. I sound like a psychotic person, like, 'oh, they're chasing me'. [laughter]

In Lucia's reported experience, dataveillance appears not as an intricate technical arrangement of devices, software and statistical techniques, but as a poorly hidden set-up. If an apparently automated video "knows" how many "likes" she has given to her partner over the years, it means that "they" are "there", covertly recording her actions on Facebook. Her reasoning seems compelling. But, as Amanda (Excerpt 5.8 above), Lucia questions: is she a bit "psychotic" for thinking about these things? It might be that that the interview setting, and her possible wish not to appear self-centred ("like, 'oh, they're chasing me'"), led her to express self-doubt as an ironic defence mechanism. However, it is reasonable to conclude that this sense is linked as strongly to her assumptions about Facebook as to her need to perform for the interviewer. Noticing the conspiratorial tone of her answer, but not finding an alternative explanation for it, she likely found herself in a position to both trust and doubt her own conclusions.

So far, I have examined descriptions of Facebook accurate responses to participants' online actions. However, Octavio, a cultural producer, reported noticing responses to a different kind of element:

> [5.11] I had noticed these questions of ... these responses, these indications of places, which are quite peculiar. They can see that I'm here in the library [where the interview took place], that I came yesterday here and I'm here again. So, what do they understand? That I often attend to this area. And they advertise things from this area. And it's so clear ... You have, like, an advertising of a car repair shop, or of a furniture store. [But] why are they going to send me things from both Campinas [a city near São Paulo] and São Paulo, if these cities are not even stuck together, if there is a road linking them?

[46] This suspicion would become a global rumour (Martínez, 2017).
[47] Messages created by Facebook to commemorate alleged milestones in end users' connections (Facebook, 2018).

> They're reading the things I do. I don't always 'check in' on Facebook, but I still see myself read, that I go to São Paulo quite often ... And why? Thus, there is a reading.

The "responses" Octavio talks about were not given to his clicks, searches, or any online actions. Rather, they were responses to his geolocation. In his news feed, he started to see ads from shops in two cities (São Paulo and Campinas). He does not "check in" to physical spaces using Facebook – so, what other explanation could there be for these sudden appearances except that he travels frequently to these locations? The reasonable conclusion is very "clear", he said: "they are reading the things" he does – even if these "things" happen offline.

Not all the responses narrated by these interviewees were performed *by* the platform. In particular, when asked to explain how they had developed understandings about who could see the expressions of their civic voices on the platform, interviewees often pointed to other end users. Antonio, a real estate agent, offered a typical explanation:

> [5.12] If the person did not give his opinion, it is not possible to know who saw [the post]. If the person only visualized, [but] didn't 'like' it, did nothing, I can't find out. Now if you do anything, give it a thumb up, then I already know [who saw the post].

Since Facebook offers no data about "views" for personal profiles (only for pages), in the absence of some kind of reaction (an "opinion" such as a "like", in Antonio's words), it is almost impossible for anyone to be sure about whether someone saw or not their post. However, participants not only *noticed* the reactions. They also reported finding patterns in these reactions, patterns that, commonly, coalesced around some sort of continuity. Those who interacted with their posts were depicted as those who had interacted with them before, as Adão, a high-school teacher, told me:

> [5.13] I think that there is a device of Facebook itself that shows what I want to see, it's always the same 20 people. The people that I 'like' more often, the people that I talk to more often, with whom I interact the most, because Facebook maybe thinks I'm interested in these persons. So, it's like 20 people, I once even counted them up. It's always the same bunch of 20.

For Adão, the formation of a Facebook "bubble" (a term he used frequently in our interview) was so evident that he could even enumerate its members ("it's like 20 people", the "same bunch" who commonly interacted with him). He sensed a pattern of appearances in his news feed which, in Adão's description, is not produced by these 20 people alone, but also by the "device" that Facebook uses to show what he wants to see, as he put it. That is to say, he can only know who is seeing his

posts because others are reacting, but these others are only reacting because his posts were offered to them in the first place by “Facebook itself”.

Sometimes, responses appeared to be noticed by interviewees through other means. Vicente, the theatre teacher, told me that he thinks that more people see his posts than actually react to them. I asked him to explain:

> [5.14] I imagine this because some people, when you meet in-person, they comment [on his Facebook activity]: ‘You’re always posting, um?’. A friend of mine who usually doesn’t ‘like’… it’s not that she disagrees, but she doesn’t ‘like’. There was a protest that was bit rough and then she sent me an inbox message: ‘Where are you? I'm worried’. That is, she was following the things I was posting [about the protest].

As Vicente’s description exemplifies, there are also responses which, while happening through Facebook, are not public. In Vicente’s example, a friend sent him a private chat message to ask if he was alright, which Vicente interpreted as meaning that the friend had seen his posts about a “protest that was a bit rough” and was “worried” about him.

However, not everyone observed patterns of accurate responses by drawing “cause and consequence” inferences between their actions and what appears on their news feeds. Several reported understanding the governing of visibility via different sorts of comparisons. Consider four examples.

Fabricio, a telemarketer:

> [5.15] There is the normal news feed and the "see latest" news feed. In my "normal" [feed], what appears most often [is] what I "like" more often. When I go in the “latest”, everything appears. It's different.

Julia, who works as a freelance journalist:

> [5.16] When [João] Dória won [the elections and became mayor of São Paulo in 2016], within my bubble, he wouldn’t win. I was inserted [in a “bubble”], most people were talking about other candidates. Suddenly Dória wins in the first round. This means I didn’t perceive the diversity of opinion, of choice.

Lucia, the actress:

> [5.17] We speculate: ‘Why do these people appear? Are they the people you like the most, or are they the people who most visit your page?, Why don’t I appear in my friend’s [news feed] if we are such good friends [outside of Facebook]?’. [She concluded] it

has something to do with access [to one's profile], with going to that space [the profile] several times. It stays in your history.

And, lastly, the video-maker Amanda:

[5.18] I sometimes visit [the Facebook page of] MBL [*Movimento Brasil Livre,* Free Brazil Movement].[48] I have gotten terrified. I got scared because you realize that those guys... I don't have, like, a deep knowledge about politics, [but she realized] that a lot of people out there [in the MBL page] are just a front, and that there is a much bigger force behind [MBL].

In these four examples, participants' exposure to diversity reveals the sameness of their news feeds. Fabricio depicts a sort of intra-news feed comparison: he switched an interface button allowing the news feed to be ordered either chronologically or according to what he "likes" "more often". Then, he noticed that what he "likes" "more often" was not there ("It's different"). He seems to be talking about the possibility of choosing between "Most recent" and "Top Stories" configurations of the feed (Facebook, 2019a). Julia's example entails a comparison not to other formats of the feed, but to reality itself. She said that when she failed to "perceive" what was really going on in the São Paulo's mayoral 2016 election, it became apparent to her that she was "inserted" in a "bubble". The winning candidate, the conservative João Dória, won in the first round – but in her news feed, full of progressives, he was mostly absent, Julia said. Lucia's example indicates that what happens on Facebook does not necessarily stay on Facebook. Posts are a topic of in-person talks and, as other participants told me, the reason for quarrels, jokes and discussions. Lucia described how, often, she compared and talked about the patterns of her news feed with those of her friends to try to understand why certain "people appear" or do not appear on their news feeds. Lastly, Amanda was one of the participants who described being concerned, explicitly, with trying to "burst her bubble" on Facebook, as she put it. She is politically progressive and, eventually, visited Facebook spaces dominated by conservatives, as she told me. She had seen the Facebook page of a right-wing social movement (*MBL*) and had been "scared" to learn that there is a "much bigger" force behind this organization – although what she meant by this was unclear from her explanation. In contrast, her surprise indicates how her own news feed seemed to be impervious to the sort of content she observed in the MBL page.

The interview excerpts analysed in this section indicate that, by observing certain patterns of likeness, participants developed the understanding that their past actions are read and might inform

[48] MBL is one of the right-wing new social movements that emerged during the Brazilian crisis (Section 2.2.).

accurate responses by Facebook (or "filter", "the algorithm", "system", "device") in the future. In the next section, I consider some examples in which this perceived accuracy seems missing.

5.2.2. 'Some People I Talk to Never Show Up': Schematization Through Inaccurate Responses

Joaquim, a script writer, explained to me that he had noticed a sort of glitch in how Facebook decides what will show up in his news feed:

> [5.19] Automatically, when I interact, read, spend more time in a post, even if you do not 'share' [it], Facebook understood that it generated some interest. Sometimes you read a long text that you actually didn't like but the person [author of the text] starts to appear more often because you spent some time reading it [the text].

I suggest that the difference between his description and those I discussed in the previous section lies in the term "automatically". Joaquim appears to think that Facebook's "algorithm", as he described it many times in our conversation, is not so smart. It does not really *know* what he or anyone else wants to see; it just makes automated decisions based on what end users "interact" with and "read". The more time spent on a post, the more that post will be judged by the algorithm as of "interest" to that person – regardless of what the user really thinks, he seems to think. Thus, in his example, he might more often see someone who he does not find particularly relevant simply because he spent a long time reading a "long text" from that person. For him, this sort of misguided visibility definition seems to reveal the disparity between the logic of the algorithm, which he depicts as conflating interactions with relevance, and his logics of relevance, in which interaction could mean many different things – including disapproval. There is a response, but this response presents a subjective strangeness: in working well objectively, the algorithm failed to offer Joaquim what he personally wanted to see.

The perceived inaccuracy of some definitions made by Facebook helped participants to arrive at different conclusions from the one Joaquim reported. For instance: Vigo, an accountant, told me how a subjective glitch made him suspicious about the platform's "algorithm":

> [5.20] I thought it [the 'algorithm'] was about interaction. Then I saw that there were some people who I talked to a lot, but they never showed up. These people who won't appear [in his newsfeed] think rather differently from me. There is this friend, I consider him as a brother, but we sometimes go a few rounds in the Messenger [Facebook private chat] and he's never there [in his news feed]. That's when I got it, I said, 'gosh these guys [Facebook] are smart'.

Usually, Vigo appears to believe, the "algorithm" works "by interaction". Yet, he came to realize that, at least in relation to some end users, this logic did not seem to work. Why is it that he

rarely sees those who think "differently" from him in political terms, even though he interacts quite frequently with them?, Vigo apparently wondered. He told me that he concluded that Facebook surreptitiously and intentionally divides right and left ("'these guys are smart'"). Vigo offered no further explanation for why Facebook would do that, but this impression of a mistaken definition by Facebook's "algorithm" is a different sort than that reported by Joaquim. It is not that Facebook tried, but failed to divine what Vigo wished to see – the platform apparently does not care about what he wishes or not; its motivations are themselves political, Vigo seemed to have concluded.

For Fernanda, an engineer, inaccurate responses could indicate alterations in Facebook's inner workings.

> [5.21] Once, I realized that it [the algorithm] had changed. For two days in a row, it kept appearing folks' profile pictures. I said, 'wow, this is a lot of profile photos, would everyone be changing their profile at the same time?'. Then I realized: they are changing the algorithm. Because it's not always that people change their profile picture. Then, after two days, it [the algorithm] returned [to normal].

Fernanda heard of "algorithms" in a postgraduate marketing course, she told me. In this excerpt, she describes them as a typical infrastructural element, which usually goes unnoticed until it breaks down. Like a broken water pipe whose eventual repair may temporarily disrupt the everyday flow of life, she said that that "the algorithm" would go on the blink when it was tweaked. Profile pictures, which appeared only if they were altered (i.e. interacted with), started to show up continuously ("'wow, this is a lot of profile photos'"). Likewise, when the inaccurate responses stopped, this seemingly meant that the "change" to "the algorithm" had been finalized. The sort of glitch she describes differs from those examined in this section so far. "Algorithms" fail for reasons that, in her description, seems to be technical – rather than subjective or political. To my knowledge, there are no evidences that modifications to Facebook's algorithms would indeed create the sort of inaccurate responses Fernanda describes. From the perspective of this study, this is largely irrelevant; what matters is that this perceived "change", real or not, apparently helped Fernanda to further her understanding of how the platform governs the visibility of her news feed.

In the same way that other end users' familiar responses helped interviewees to make sense of Facebook's visibility regime (see previous section), interviewees also noticed when their posts received *unexpected* reactions. For instance, Lorenzo, a retail clerk, said that:

[5.22] You are not invisible on social media. I had posts that were liked or commented by people who I haven't seen in 20 years. So if *that* person, who I had completely forgotten, commented, surely, folks will see [original emphasis].

This comment emerged when Lorenzo was explaining why he thought that "everything" one does on Facebook might end up being seen by other end users, and the risks this poses for ordinary people like him when talking politics in this space. His reasoning was associative: if his posts were seen (thus, "liked", "commented") by people he no longer remembered, how could he be sure that other end users, complete strangers even, would not see his posts? It is not that Facebook's government of visibility is random – Lorenzo demonstrated in our conversation an awareness of the interactional bias of the platform's algorithms (see Section 3.6.2). However, there is a persistent possibility that, due to some unknown decision, he might be exposed to people with whom he rarely interacts, Lorenzo appears to think.

In the previous section, I referred to comparisons helping interviewees to notice the sameness created by Facebook's accurate responses. Other comparisons helped people to realize *the absence* of a particular response. For instance, Nicolas, who is employed in a call centre, told me that:

[5.23] I don't block anyone. But folks block me, many have blocked me.

[JCM][49] How do you know?

Because, suddenly, you can't find [their posts] in the [news] feed. Then, I searched [for the] the person, and [the person] had disappeared.

As he said in the interview, Nicolas sensed that his quasi-socialist political positions made him a pariah amongst his friends, relatives and work colleagues. When he observed that posts from some of his Facebook connections stopped appearing in his news feed and their profiles could not be found through searches, even though he had not stopped interacting with these people, he concluded that they had "blocked" him. Like other participants quoted in this section, he started to make sense of what was going on by noticing a break in the familiar pattern of his news feed.

So far, this chapter has examined how interviewees described noticing different sorts of recurrences and interruptions in different areas of reality (visual representations on the interface, such as "likes", images, texts, and offline interactions, events, and places). These recurrences and interruptions, they told me, led them to conclude that these areas were either connected in a logical,

[49] Acronym for author's name.

cause-consequence relationship (what I termed accurate responses), or that this connection was missing (what I termed inaccurate responses). It seems, however, that these two forms of responses are related. As the excerpts of my interviews with Fernanda (Excerpt 5.21), Lorenzo (Excerpt 5.22) and Nicolas (Excerpt 5.23) suggest, participants were only able to sense a break due to their expectation of sameness. Put another way, inaccurate responses could be understood as such due to an apparent default expectation of accuracy. I return to this point in Section 9.2.

In the next section, I turn to a rather different form of schematization of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime.

5.3. Information

This second part examines how interviewees described making sense of Facebook's algorithmic regime of visibility through *information*.[50] Their descriptions denote three sources of information: *traditional media; platforms;* and *social interactions*. In the cases analysed in the next three section, participants appear to have compared the information they were exposed with their own experiences on Facebook, or with other information about the platform. In this way, they illustrate Emirbayer and Mische's (1998, p. 979) point on how patterns often are perceived through comparisons between one's "emerging experience" with those of the past, "either within the actor's direct memory or within a social memory as objectified in various media of communication".

5.3.1. 'I Have a Notion of What's an Algorithm': Schematization Through Traditional Media Information

Consider the following interview excerpts about how participants had discovered what they told me they knew about Facebook:

> [5.24] Well, I watched the Snowden movie[51] recently and this [points to his phone] is a portable spy machine. [**Artur, documentarist**]
>
> [5.25] Oh, [I became aware of algorithms] through readings. I don't remember the [media] outlet now. But there has been a lot of comments on this question of Facebook. [**Julia, freelancer journalist**]
>
> [5.26] There is an episode of [the TV series] 'The Good Wife' that is very interesting. One woman was complaining that the algorithm [of a website] put her restaurant location in a dangerous area, and it was not a dangerous area. It was only in a more distant

[50] I realise that "information" is a disputed term. My approach to it is essentially empirical: what interviewees told me that they had read, heard and saw, and which helped them to schematize Facebook's algorithm visibility regime.
[51] "Citizenfour" (Poitras, 2014).

neighbourhood, but with that she was losing customers. [The discussion was]: Does the website have this right? **[Ireni, lawyer]**

At the time of my fieldwork (January to March 2017), Brazil's (and the world's) mainstream media were abuzz with pieces on the, then recent, victory of Donald Trump in the 2016 US elections, which compounded the global surprise at the results of the Brexit referendum held in the UK. A key question addressed by these pieces was how these events had come to pass and a frequent answer was Facebook. This context – and the then still lingering debate about the 2013/2014 Snowden scandal – perhaps helps to explain why many interviewees told me that some of what they knew about Facebook's visibility regime had been acquired from traditional media. Some of these media were fictional (the TV series Ireni talks about), others were journalistic (the reports mentioned by Julia, the documentary movie watched by Artur). Importantly, the information they talk about are not full explanations of the platform's algorithmic visibility regime, but fragments: the idea of pervasive surveillance (Artur), the deployment of an "algorithm" (Julia), the possibility of automated injustice (Ireni). Interviewees appeared to have used these bits of information to reflect on their own experience on Facebook – and then articulated this during our conversation.[52]

The role of information could exhibit yet another facet. Consider the following excerpt on how some participants concluded that state agents could visibilize their civic voice expressions on Facebook.

[5.27] I am, in fact, inferring from all I have read about activism and intelligence agencies. [**Telma, musician**]

[5.28] [I learned these things by] reading things and watching a lot of conspiracy movies. These days I watched that one from [Noam] Chomsky, 'Requiem for an American Dream', he talks about this connection between the big multinationals and the governmental political system. [**Vicente, theatre teacher**]

[5.29] For example, when something closer [to her] happened, 'oh, they revealed that thing about [former President] Lula', or '[Judge Sergio] Moro managed to reveal that other thing'… these events made me think: 'Okay, we put our lives on a social network – but to what extent I want people to have access to it [her life]?' [**Rosa, nurse**]

In the descriptions of Telma, Vicente and Rosa, books, documentary movies and journalistic pieces are essential for them to make sense of how Facebook governs their visibility. Yet these media are neither about Facebook's visibility regime nor about any specific element of the platform

[52] The possibility that their explanations emerged only during the interview cannot be discarded (see Section 4.2 on this study's constructivist approach) .

(algorithms, “bubbles”). They refer to “activism and intelligence agencies” (Telma), the “connection” between state and businesses (Vicente) and the surveillance operations realized against authorities by the Car Wash Operation in Brazil (Rosa). While they apparently never saw any concrete information about state agents monitoring people like them on Facebook, they seem to associate Facebook with a wider matrix of uncertainty and power asymmetries. If a judge can reveal the secrets of a former president, as Rosa concluded from reading the news on Brazil’s massive corruption scandal; if, as Vicente described, there is abundant evidence of “conspiracies” between powerful companies and states; and if, as Telma seemed to believe, these conspiracies may target “activism” – if all these ideas as true, it is logical to think that Brazilian state agents may be able to monitor their civic voice expressions on Facebook in ways that are not entirely clear to them. They seem to have transformed generic narratives of power into interpretative frameworks for what happens in Facebook.

Yet, traditional media were only one of the sources of information about the platform that participants mentioned, as the next two sections indicate.

5.3.2. ‘According to Analytics…’: Schematization Through Platform Information

Many interviewees, when asked about how they had developed certain understandings of Facebook’s algorithmic visibility regime, replied with explanations not about the platform but about other end users – their actions and motivations, which affected what participants saw and how they were seen on the interface.

Consider for instance what I was told by Luis, a pensioner. Until 2015, he had been able to boost his retirement pension with freelance consulting jobs. With the onset of the economic recession in Brazil, this additional source of income dried up. When we met, in early 2017, he was wondering whether his newly discovered passion for conservative politics could solve some of his financial troubles. He described to me the possibility of monetizing the videos in which he articulated strident attacks upon the left. For this to be financially rewarding, the videos needed to be seen by more people and, to achieve this, Luis calculated that the platform analytics were essential:

> [5.30] According to YouTube analytics, my audience is between 24-34 years old. So, I have two tracks, being 40% from 24 to 34 and the rest from 34 to 54. And there are about 10% that is diffuse, a minority. I'm going to find out where the error is, because 90% of the view is still male. On Facebook is the opposite. Most of it is feminine, my posts. I have to understand what is happening there.

At the time of our conversation, making money out of his own civic voice expressions on platforms seemed a distant reality for Luis. However, in this excerpt, he appears to talk as a marketer

of himself, reciting information on his viewers' as a businessman would arguably describe his target audiences. These numbers allowed him to construct certain ideas about the end users who compose his Facebook "audience" (mostly over 34 year-old, mostly female). For Luis, knowing to whom he was talking was essential to understand what he had to say to expand the number of people who watched his political videos (the topic of Chapter 8).

Yet, not all interviewees appeared to trust in information produced by Facebook itself. Gael, a graphic artist, was at the time of our interview helping to administer a Facebook page about environmental issues. In this capacity, he said that what really affected the reach of civic voice on Facebook was the "Share" button – which counts as both an interaction and a direct propagation of the post. Therefore, understanding why other end users would "share" something was fairly relevant to his goal of increasing the reach of the page's posts. But "Facebook metrics" did not mean much to him, he said:

> [5.31] When people 'share' [his posts], they write their own little subtitle. I take a look at it. If my text isn't that good, people will write their own text when sharing. If the text is good, people share and don't add anything. What they think is missing [in the post], they write. [I also see] what their 'friends' answered [in the 'shares'], and sometimes I go to people's profiles to see what's the ideological profile of the person. To me this is much more insightful than looking at that control panel of Facebook [page], which speaks of clicks. I think I can understand better when you see these 'shares', than [with] these [Facebook] metrics, which I think are a mega bullshit.

Gael appears to think that the best way to understand whether the posts of the page he administers were appreciated was not "metrics" (a "mega bullshit", in his words) but a sort of qualitative profiling. He described reading the texts his readers wrote when "sharing" his posts, the comments strangers left in the "shared" post and, "sometimes" visiting the profiles of these people to check their "ideological" leaning. He is interested in making sense not only of how many people have clicked on his posts but also *why* they did (or not): did they like or dislike, what was missing?, he appears to ponder, in this excerpt. In linking various information (text, profile, comments), Gael can get some intuitive understanding of his typical reader, with the likely goal of honing his messages to better please this audience.

5.3.3. 'I Talked a Lot to My Teachers": Schematization Through Social Interaction

So far, I have examined descriptions on how interviewees paid attention (and were thus being exposed) to different forms of recorded information. This section discusses information on who can visibilize whom on Facebook that were communicated through social interaction.

Let me begin with a rumour I heard repeatedly from conservative participants regarding something called “MAVs”. When asked them what or who was a “MAV”, I was told that:

> [5.32] [MAVs] are [leftist] parties that pay for human beings to manage a series of profiles. [**Helena, law student**]
>
> [5.33] Today, there are MAVs, which stands for… malware… something like that. Automatic MAVs are created by hackers. [**Fabricio, telemarketer**]
>
> [5.34] What is a MAV? I understand it to stand for ‘activist in a virtual environment’ [*Militante em Ambiente Virtual*]. They come around and take your page down, fuck your Facebook up, send you death threats. [**Davi, English teacher**]
>
> [5.35] They swarm your page with reports. [**Maria, event organizer**]

According to these participants, the idea of “MAV” circulated in conservative Facebook and WhatsApp groups. Despite these similar sources, no-one was able to define a MAV precisely. Explanations involved pauses and expressions of doubt. I was told variously that MAV was an acronym referring to “activists” in the “virtual” space, i.e. fake Facebook profiles used by leftists to wage visibility wars against the right (Davi, Excerpt 5.34; Maria, Excerpt 5.35). Some seemed to believe that MAVs were controlled by leftist political parties (Helena, Excerpt 5.32), others thought they were automated (Fabricio, Excerpt 5.33). Whereas no-one was certain of what a MAV was, all participants who mentioned this mysterious figure appeared to fear its ability to game Facebook’s content moderation system against them. These rumours apparently helped the interviewees to make sense of why so many pages of conservative groups (sometimes their own pages) went offline and, more broadly, of the ways in which the government of visibility on Facebook could be exploited for political reasons.

Information about Facebook or related topics circulated widely in various other spheres which are not overtly political, I was told by multiple interviewees. Rafael, a conservative law student, told me that his former job was instrumental to his understanding of how Facebook works:

> [5.36] I worked as a DBA [Database Administrator], not specifically with social media, but databases basically work in the same way. You can pull any kind of information about anything that is happening inside the database. So, for instance, if Facebook’s people have a situation where the word ‘multiculturalism’ suddenly pops on someone's profile, they might start to check this person’s profile, if it’s far-right or far-left. Like, ‘we will start to monitor this guy, if the person posts ‘multiculturalism’, or a curse, we have to receive an alert because this guy is beginning to be a problem for Facebook, or for a political ideology’, I don’t know.

As a DBA, Rafael was exposed to the information that digital databases allow their controllers to monitor key words. By comparing this (another) fragment of information to what he knows about Facebook's ideological leaning, he appeared to identify a pattern that helps him to explain how the platform's content moderation works. If Facebook is a massive database, which is what Rafael seemed to assume, what stops the platform from creating an "alert" for uses of ideologically-charged expressions such as "multiculturalism"? A simple command could probably carry out this kind of monitoring, he appeared to imply.

Others told me that they had been exposed to some basic information on computation and the functioning of the Facebook platform through pedagogic experiences. For example:

> [5.37] I did a very short course in programming, two months. I didn't learn anything, to be honest. But I have a notion of what's an algorithm, programming, programming language, Java Script.[**Nicolas, telemarketer**]

> [5.38] I talked a lot to my [college] teachers, I had all kinds of talk. We were talking, informally, then my teacher said, 'I think Facebook always had this [interactional bias]', he said, and 'these reactions of 'love', 'wow'," are related to that too'. [**Bernardo, public employee**]

The experiences depicted in these excerpts suggest that topics such as "algorithm" and "bubbles" are discussed in pedagogic but not necessarily technical specialist circles. These include a short course for people without a university degree, such as the one taken by Nicolas, or a corridor talk with a college teacher in Bernardo's case. In these informal and transitory spaces, they acquired some information that helped them to cast light on how the platform works. This information was sometimes about Facebook directly (in the case of Bernardo) or was appeared in the form of an underlying concept which was applied to the immediate reality of the platform ("algorithm", in the case of Nicolas).

Since algorithms, "bubbles" and cognate terms related to Facebook's visibility regime circulated widely in interviewees' media diet and, sometimes, were utilized in the everyday work and learning environments, it is hardly surprising that information about the platform also infiltrated their domestic lives. For instance, Artur, the documentarist, told me how important talking to his wife was in his learning about visibility on Facebook:

> [5.39] [After he began to talk about politics on Facebook] I started to fight with a friend, then I fought with another, and then another, you start to fight with everyone. Then, my partner said: 'Dude, stop fighting with your friends, just hide what they post'. Then I did that, I cleaned my timeline. I went there and hid, clicked on 'Hide Posts from This Person'.

It might that Artur was already aware that there was a way of not seeing the political posts of some of his friends – especially those with whom, as a result of the deepening of crisis, he had started to "fight" all the time. However, it was his wife who provided him with the information about "Hide Post", which did not involve "blocking" or "unfollowing" the person.

Some few participants described having invented their own area of reality to make sense of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime, as described next.

5.4. Probing Actions

The excerpts examined so far in this chapter described schematizations that depended on *areas of reality*, so to speak, which existed regardless of the participants' explicit desire to understand Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime. These macro areas were populated by concrete *micro* areas, so to speak: their own actions, posts and visual representations of reactions on their news feeds (e.g. "likes"), actions from other end users, texts, images and movies in traditional media products, numbers in their screens (analytics), rumours, professional and pedagogic experiences, domestic conversations, etc. However, interviewees' reported attempts to make sense of this visibility regime also involved intentionally creating a macro area so as to produce concrete micro areas from which patterns about Facebook could be identified. I call these *probing actions,* of which two kinds surfaced in my fieldwork: *improvised surveys* and *improvised algorithm audits*. In the descriptions analysed below, there seems to exist a dynamic conjunction of the two "areas" analysed above. After being exposed to some *information* about the algorithmic visibility regime, the participants provoked a *response* so as to produce a different sort of *information*. While Emirbayer and Mische (1998) do not contemplate this form of schematization, its dynamics involve familiar elements: allocation of attention and identification of patterns.

5.4.1. 'I Have to Fix My Own Tools': Schematization Through Improvised Survey

Above, I analysed descriptions of how participants used Facebook's analytics or news feed visual elements to identify patterns about other end users. Daniel, a businessman, told me that he had to find other means to understand his readers.

Over the course of the Brazilian crisis, he developed a relatively large readership on Facebook. The natural next step, he said, would be to create a Facebook page, what would give him access to a panel of analytics about visitors – as Luis had, for instance (Excerpt 5.30). However, this could be a trap, he said. The platform would "hide" posts of his eventual page to force him to pay for more reach

– something that he learned in his work. He decided then to stick with the personal profile. And, in order to have some kind of information about who his readers were, he fixed his own "tools":

> [5.40] Since I do not have the [embedded] tools to measure [his readers], I have to fix my own tools. One of the things I used to do was a survey, every Friday. There is this Survey Monkey tool that you can create a survey. So I did the survey [by posting the Survey Monkey link]. Most of the questions were stupid, but what I was really interested in was the demographics. I'd always ask things like, 'are you a man or a woman', so I could have ... demographic data about who was responding. It's not much, and in no way scientific. You write and get the responses, [and realize] what is working.

By eliciting responses to his post – even though these responses were provided outside of Facebook and with the aid of a software foreign to the platform's visibility regime – Daniel managed to collect information ("demographics") about his readers. His "not scientific" endeavour did not illuminate any aspect of Facebook itself. However, in Daniel's view, it would make him well placed to understand why his posts were more or less interacted with and thus seen by more people – if they were "working", as he said. That is, by using third-party software to manually profile those end users, Daniel assumed he could make partial sense of the environment where he articulated his civic voice expressions.

As the following section indicates, the relations between information and responses may be distinct.

5.4.2. 'I Like to See Where the Hole Is': Schematization Through Improvised Algorithm Audits

An early adopter of various online services, Fabio, who manages a tattoo shop, told me that he has a long history of "experimenting" with "social networks". At the time of our conversation, he appeared to have developed a love-hate relationship with Facebook: he described himself as a heavy user who deeply despised the platform. Among other reasons, because he thinks Facebook is "super racist":

> [5.41] I like to see how social networks function, to see where the hole is. [For instance], I like to see what we can publish in terms of nudity. I found out that, if it's a picture of Kate Moss [the White female model], then you can post a picture of her breasts. But not the breasts of a Black woman. If you post the breasts of a Black woman, Facebook will find it. It could be that someone reports it, but I saw that Facebook also has an automatic [system]. I posted Rihanna [the Black female singer] naked, and he [the system] said: 'No, this image you can't [post]'. It has a filter that already identifies pubic hair, or the nipple, and takes it away [the picture]. But it's funny. I saw that, with Katie Moss... I posted several pictures. The only one [Moss' picture] that Facebook said 'no' was one which showed her pubic hair. Then Facebook said, 'no, hold on'.. I

> remember that Karina Burh [a Brazilian singer] posted a photo of a Black woman, big breasts, fat, and the Facebook didn't like it. I think it was too much [laughs]. I don't know if it's Facebook or someone [who reported the picture], because she [the singer] has many followers, maybe someone complained. But I think the app [Facebook] is super retrograde, super racist.

Fabio's depiction resembles a form of improvised algorithm audit (see Sandvig, Hamilton, Karahalios, & Langbort, 2014): he intentionally inputs certain content (naked posts of the Black singer/model, Rihanna, and of the White model, Kate Moss) and, from observation of the outputs (Rihanna's picture got taken down; Moss's usually did not), saw a pattern and constructed an understanding of Facebook's algorithmic decision-making process ("the app" is itself "super racist", regardless of any complaint from other users).

From a scientific perspective, it can be argued that the experiment is hugely flawed. But Fabio is no scientist; he was interested, only, in testing information obtained from a public figure (the Brazilian singer Karina Burh). Of course, the very idea of testing assumes that he knew that Facebook's "automatic" content moderation system could respond to his actions. Somewhat similar to the descriptions analysed in the first part of this chapter, Fabio appears to assume a cause-consequence dynamic. Facebook allows a picture to be posted (cause) and if it decides to take the picture down (consequence), it will *visibly* communicate this decision with a message ("he said: no") and with the absence of the picture in his timeline. That is, instead of collecting information through responses (as Daniel), he uses responses from the platform to test information communicated by another user.

A second variety of improvised algorithm audit I identified during my field work involved more actors. As implied in Excerpt 5.36 above, Rafael, the conservative law student, suspected that Facebook has a covert political agenda. This idea, he told me, came from information he acquired from reading and listening to *Infowars*, the far-right conspiratorial North-American multi-media website. The idea that Facebook might discriminate against conservative material gained personal traction with Rafael when his own expression of civic voice began to trigger fewer reactions. He talked to a fellow conservative friend, who reported the same "limitation of reach", and decided to investigate:

> [5.42] It happened to me, this limitation of reach. I can't tell you what's behind it. Usually, when people feel this issue of reach, we [conservatives] publish a message on our Facebook page, [saying]: 'If you saw this post, please 'like' it, I need to check the reach of my network', to test it, really. It was incredible how this [test] post in which I did not mention nor linked anything about politics, had a very good reach. But all the other posts [with political content], that I posted two or three days after this [test]

> post had almost no reach. I have a clear conscience of what is really relevant, among the things I post, and what is bullshit. And among these posts [that had no reach] there were things that were very significant. Most of my [Facebook] 'friends' are involved with politics. They would have 'liked' them [the supposedly hidden messages], they would have commented something. You end up noticing, because… I keep thinking – I posted something silly and it was shared, I posted something interesting and it was shared, and now I posted something super interesting, a shocking revelation and folks didn't feel anything, didn't share, didn't speak? It's intriguing. There's an unknown: why is this happening? Why does it happen in a certain moment, and in another moment it doesn't happen?

Rafael's probing actions configured a form of improvised algorithmic audit that is different from the one examined in the previous section. While Fabio's test involved what appeared to him to be a direct response from the platform to his action, Rafael's was *in*direct. He seemed to assume that, unlike content moderation algorithms, news feed algorithms cannot be tested directly. Thus, other end users' reactions could be used as a proxy. Similar to someone who tries to measure the depth of a well by dropping a pebble and waiting to hear how long it will take for the water to splash, Rafael sent a post to his network and waited for the elicited echoes. As in Fabio's case, it is easy to spot the flaws in his experiment: what if his "friends" could see, but simply did not *want* to "like" his political posts? But he appeared to trust in people's willingness to react to some of his political posts ("I have a clear conscience of what is really relevant") and assume that this variable is a constant. The problem, he apparently concluded by exclusion, is Facebook. Therefore, his test endorsed the information he heard on *Infowars.* Rafael said: "it was incredible how" the posts with "shocking revelations" against the left received fewer reactions. Even an ordinary end user could be "shadowbanned" automatically (see West, 2018), he seems to believe.

The probing actions analysed in the previous sections did not emerge from a vacuum; they depended on paying attention to areas of reality that were not created by Daniel, Fabio or Rafael: visual elements of their news feeds, survey software, a public declaration from a singer, Facebook's content moderation system, *Infowars'* texts and videos. What their descriptions suggest, though, is that these participants consciously combined these elements to engineer novel areas of reality, to which they then paid attention: private survey responses, automated decisions from the moderation system, and reactions to probing messages.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter examines how my interviewees made sense of (schematized) Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime – the topic of SRQ 1. My interpretation of their accounts indicates three broad forms of schematization. For many of them, the regime becomes perceivable by paying attention to what I call *responses.* The first part of the chapter analyses two ways in which patterns

may be identified in these responses: *accurate* if they noticed that Facebook's news feed changed or other end users reacted in ways understood as congruent with the meaning or nature of their online/offline actions (Section 5.2.1); and *inaccurate* if such changes/reactions were seen as not fulfilling the participants' expectations in relation to their correlate actions (Section 5.2.2). Many interviewees also described making sense of the visibility regime by attending to another macro area – *information*. As I show in the second part of the chapter, this information might come from *traditional media* (Section 5.3.1), *platforms* (Section 5.3.2), and *social interaction*s (Section 5.3.3). Thirdly, I analyse *probing actions*, a form of macro area of reality that hybridizes the first two to create micro areas of reality, which, arguably, would not be available without their interventions. These actions can be categorized as *improvised surveys* (where the participant asked other participants to complete a private survey – Section 5.4.1) and *improvised algorithm audits*, which involved the input of different content to check how the regime would react, or assessment of other end users' reactions as proxies for the decisions of the visibility regime (Section 5.4.2). The data discussed in this chapter underscores what the literature on similar processes suggests: Facebook's attempt to orient how its algorithmic visibility regime is made sense of (see Section 3.6.2) largely fails. In Section 9.2, I argue that this failure is associated with an internal contradiction of the platform's datafication power: in successfully producing a personalized news feed, Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime exposes its infrastructure, and ends up being materialized as *conspicuously invisible*.

Chapter 6 examines which schemas appear to have been produced by the schematizations processes analysed in this chapter.

Chapter 6

Three Social Imaginaries of Facebook's Algorithmic Visibility Regime

6.1. Introduction

Chapter 5 examined participants' explanations about how Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime becomes imaginable to them. By noticing patterns and shifts in the interface, being exposed to different sorts of information or, less often, engaging in improvised surveys and algorithm audits, all interviewees reported being aware that *something* operates from behind the screen to govern who can visibilize whom on Facebook.

The present chapter discusses what this *something* might be. In so doing, it addresses **SRQ 2: Which social imaginaries do ordinary end users hold of the Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime?** Consistent with the findings in Chapter 5, my analysis of the interviews suggests that all participants share three contrasting social imaginaries about the regime, which are described in three separate parts. Each part is organized according to Section 3.6.3, where I proposed that, by projecting the notion of social imaginary (Taylor, 2004) onto my formulation of algorithmic visibility regime, it is possible to highlight the main different aspects of this regime, which can be investigated as imagined by end users. These are: the *readability vector* (the ways in which dataveillance operations read end users' actions), the *sight vector* (the definition by machine learning algorithms of how end users see and are seen on the platform news feed), the way these two vectors become *entangled* and the *normative dimension* underpinning these imaginations[53] (which is relative to the presumed ability of end users to influence the functioning of the regime). Following the data analysis strategy described in Section 4.4.5, the descriptions I selected on which to ground my claims involve both interviewees' explicit articulations of their taken-for-granted understandings about the regime, and their narrated actions. Importantly, this chapter is aimed at formulating the central tenets of these three imaginaries. By providing more examples of how they were articulated by interviewees in concrete visibility control projects, Chapters 7 and 8 flesh out the findings analysed here.

6.2.1. 'We Generate the Behaviour of Algorithms': The Readability Vector as End Users' Tool of Control

While the dataveillance processes I theorized as contributing to the readability vector have been described by critical scholars of datafication as mostly detrimental to end users (Section 3.5.1), participants seemed to assume that these processes might, in fact, be beneficial to them. Consider

[53] "Imagination" is used to refer to specific elements of a social imaginary.

first what Joaquim, the script writer who experienced an episode of sudden visibility on Facebook, told me when I asked him what defines what he sees on his news feed.

> [6.1] Everyone blames the algorithms. But the algorithm, it's... we are the ones who generate their behaviour, as well. Today, I have some control over what will appear [on his news feed]. I put I do 'Not Want to See This Anymore', 'Stop Seeing Information from this Page', done, I'm excluding. There is more. People and pages that you put to 'See First'. The problem is – this requires time, and acting, you have to be active. It requires a certain maturity to understand your presence in the network, or how the network affects your life. I think most people are not so concerned with this.

Joaquim appears to be keenly and critically aware of how Facebook's algorithms work. Perhaps this familiarity explains his dissatisfaction with the idea that "the algorithm" is to "blame" for the configuration of the news feed – which "everyone" else seems to believe in. His explanation does not deny that algorithms are involved in decisions about what can or not be seen, but it adds an additional actor: Joaquim. End users like him ("we", as Joaquim says), also play a role in this decision: "we are the ones who generate their behaviour [of algorithms]. Today, I have some control over what will appear [on news feed]". This control over the "behaviour" of the "algorithms" is exerted through built-in buttons he termed "I do Not Want to See This Anymore", "Stop Seeing Information from this Page", "See First". Thanks to these interface buttons his "acting" towards the regime can be "algorithm ready" (Gillespie, 2013, p. 168). However, not everyone is "concerned" with exerting control over the algorithm in Joaquim's view. In order to have their demands met, they need to "be active", have a "certain maturity" and self-reflexivity to "understand your presence in the network". The understanding that the possibility of using these buttons depends on acting in certain ways was displayed, also, by Cristian, a geography student, who told me:

> [6.2] It's funny because, when I started using it [Facebook], I didn't dominate the tool very much. It has many things, right? I didn't know what it was to follow something, or see first. There has been like an appropriation of the tool. I started to filter what I would like to see. Sometimes you go like… [Cristian stops talking, picks up his phone and pretends to scroll down the news feed absentmindedly], right? For me, you have to see it from another angle, from another perspective.

Cristian's narrative underlines what is suggested in Joaquim's. In using interface buttons, he appears to feel he is simply not going to accept what is presented to him. Instead, he will take command, "see it from another angle", *his* angle, presumably. A more prevalent facet of the same imaginary involves the implicit understanding that interface buttons allow end users to avoid problems. Take what the left-leaning real estate agent Emilia said:

[6.3] So, my [Facebook] is quite restrict, only my 'friends' [can see what she posts]. Two weeks ago, they [Facebook] changed again the privacy configurations, so I'll have to change everything again. Because they [the configurations] are not the same in the laptop, mobile, iPad. So, if I want to wall off these people, [she will have to change each one of these devices' configurations].

"These people" she mentions are members of her family. Due to the Brazilian crisis, she told me, her relationship with her father and mother, who are politically conservative, disintegrated. As a consequence, she unfriended both of them on Facebook and became wary that they were able to see what she posted in her account. To avoid new conflicts, Emilia started using Facebook's "Privacy Settings", which allow her to decide which kind of user may or not see her posts and "wall [her parents] off". Her account nuances Joaquim's and Cristian's descriptions of control. For, while the settings gave her command over how her posts were seen, the functioning of these interface buttons were not controlled by her. Emilia demonstrated some irritation with how these "configurations" change abruptly, forcing her to engage in a form of unwanted labour.

Gael, the graphic artist, provides an example of another ambiguity regarding interface buttons.

[6.4] [Blocking is] mostly when I don't know [the blocked other user], when I have no reason why I want to keep talking to this person. Depends more on me than the person. If I'm cool, I just ignore. If I'm in a bad day, and the guy starts talking about, like, death penalty, fascists in general, I block. The Unfollow [button] has to do with the phase of the person. The cool thing about the Unfollow is that, if I want to follow that person again, I won't have to ask him, you know? It's transparent. The Block ends your friendship with that person, it's forever. I'd would have to Unblock and add the person again as my friend… The big problem is that the only tool that you have is to block or stop following. And it's a very blunt tool, a sledgehammer, yes or no. That's why I wanted to have a finer control, I wanted to see what this person writes, but not the links that they post, for example.

Gael appears to think, as do Joaquim and Cristian, that interface buttons are essentially designed to serve his wishes. They might help him not to deal with "fascist" strangers when he is on a "bad day" or friends who are in a bad "phase". Also, like Emilia, he does not appear fully satisfied with how these settings work – he wanted a "finer" control, not the "sledgehammer" of the "Block" "Unfollow" buttons. Interestingly, he also associates the buttons with social costs. The "Unfollow" is described as "transparent": it can be done and undone without the awareness of the unfollowed user. As a result, the potential social cost of unfollowing is taken by him as low, and its usage as a banal and unproblematic decision. The "Block" button, on the other hand, is pictured as a drastic measure ("it's

forever") – potentially perceptible by the blocked users and, thus, costly. Not because the blocked user would be directly informed about the blocking action, but because any attempt to reconnect would entail the unspoken confession of disconnection – or so Gael seems to think.

These accounts exemplify an implicit understanding common to all my interviewees that how Facebook reads their actions may have less to do with spying than with handing them *tools of control,* which are not free of potential costs. Of course, these interface buttons not only datafy end users' wishes. They also provide the platform with "general feedback mechanism to increase user engagement" (Vaccaro et al., 2018, p. 1). Yet, at least in this social imaginary, dataveillance seems problematic to interviewees only to the extent that it does not work exactly as they want, as indicated by Emilia's and Gael's descriptions. Next, I analyse a correlate imagination of the sight vector.

6.2.2. 'I'll Construct my Own Bubble': The Sight Vector as Visual Boundary-Making

In assuming that the platform gives them some control over how they are read, participants appear to presume that they might also exert a certain directing over the *sight vector*. To understand what this imagination is, it is useful to return to the accounts provided in the previous section. Emilia's language ("[If] I want to *wall off* these people" [emphasis added]) and Gael's image of interface buttons as a "sledgehammer" which can only include or exclude ("yes or no") suggests that the sight vector might be guided according to a visual-spatial binary: there are contents and profiles that are "in" and there are those that are "out" of one's news feed. However, another metaphor was far more common – that of "bubble". Take, first, what I was told by Lucia, who works in an NGO.

[6.5] [JCM] You talked about the bubble. How do you think this bubble is formed?

> I don't know, I'll construct my own [laughs]. There must be people who stop following me as well. As I do [unfollow some of her 'friends']. I say [to herself], 'oh, you're posting a lot of fascist stuff, I'll stop following you, otherwise I will not able to greet you on the street'.

Another useful example was provided by Humberto, the copywriter:

[6.6.] I recently did a… Facebook asked if I would like to say about the things that I wanted to see, don't want to see. I said, 'sure'.

> [JCM] Like a survey?
>
> Yes. Like, 'improve your content in the news feed', it was an option [in the interface], something like that. Then, I selected some things but… very bubble, but a bubble that... Specific contents for me to follow, specific activists, specific pages.

The idea of "bubble" has become common amongst critical scholars of datafied platforms and, as suggested in Section 5.3.1, appeared to have infiltrated journalistic accounts in Brazil on how Facebook works. These depictions further exemplify how the term has been appropriated by ordinary people. In Lucia's and Humberto's descriptions, the "bubble" is described not as a construct of the platform itself, but as a consequence of their own actions, through the "Unfollow" button. In Lucia's case, similar to Gael's, the "bubble" functions as a protective environment, preventing personal relationships from breaking down. As Lucia said, if she does not exclude some Facebook "friends" who post "fascist stuff", she might be unable to engage with these people in real-life situations ("greet" them "on the street", for instance). The "bubble" could be understood, also, as important to *include* certain things that the platform does not show, as Humberto's quote indicates. For him, "bubble" has become a pejorative term to describe some content that is too personalized ("very bubble"). At the same time, he insisted that the "bubble" to which he was referring to? was not necessarily negative: it included serious content – of "activists", "pages".

Another perspective on why people manually form "bubbles" on Facebook was presented to me by Alvaro, a private tutor.

> [6.7] [It's not only the algorithm, it is also], the people I know, who introduce me to people they know, and almost everyone knows people from the same places. Sometimes the person will introduce me to a new person who is someone I've known before. There is an algorithm but I think this algorithm is in some way a reproduction of how we live. We live in enclaves, looking for similar people.

Olivia, the editor, said something similar:

> [6.8] This [São Paulo] is a big, huge city, but people who have studied in certain schools, who have more or less the same level of education, they are somehow connected. It's very common for someone to add me [as Facebook 'friend'] and I'll check and the person has 30 'friends' in common with me. They are people who, in addition to common interests, had a more or less similar formation, attended more or less the same type of school, more or less the same kind of university, so we end up being paired. We live in a bubble outside of Facebook too. Bubble of people who, in my case, always lived in upper-middle-class neighbourhoods, studied in private schools, studied at the University of São Paulo, then lived with people from upper-middle class.

These accounts seem to suggest that people might form "enclaves", in Alvaro's words, not only because they specifically want to see or not see some content/profiles, but because their Facebook actions largely reflect "bubbles" that exist outside Facebook. It is not uncommon, Alvaro said, to be introduced to new people on the platform that he actually already knew or, in Olivia's case,

with whom she has "30 'friends' in common". The acting of "friending" others is, thus, permeated by non-Facebook ties, which Olivia links, explicitly, to socioeconomic inequalities (see Section 2.2): the "kind" of schools and universities people attended, which in Brazil reflects wider income and geographical differences ("upper-middle-class neighbourhoods"). This does not mean that these "bubbles" are built against their will – as Alvaro says, people "look for similar" others. They are still making decisions on who is "in" and who is "out" of their news feed.

The metaphor of the "bubble" points to attempts, primarily, to delimit participants' *own* vision fields and, secondarily, the vision fields of users they are connected to. Consider, however, what Maria, a politically conservative event organizer, said:

> [6.9] Block, unfollow? Oh yeah. The people I know in real life [she won't block], but these people I met [online] because of politics, oh, I made a cleansing. My block list has a scroll bar [laughs]. A dick comes up talking shit? Blocked. You have this information war: just as they want to limit our range, we want to cut theirs [range short as well].

Maria told me that she spends much of her time involved in political disputes with both "lefties" and conservative fellows on Facebook and other platforms. Her description reflects this sort of conflictual engagement. She does not appear to have second thoughts about blocking end users with whom she disagrees. On the contrary – she talked proudly about how long her list of blocked profiles was (it even has "has a scroll bar", Maria laughed). What sets her account apart from the others analysed in this section is the suggestion that, by blocking other end users, she will not only insulate herself from this other end user, but also "limit" the "range" of this other user, more generally. Her understanding, as I interpret it, is that, if a user is constantly blocked, this user will have her overall seeability decreased by Facebook. This would be important because different ideological factions, she says, are involved in an "information war" whose victory appears to involve high seeability. To put it another way, blocking someone serves not only to preserve relationships, increase the quality of the content in one's news feed and reinforce socioeconomic sameness but also to attack perceived opponents.

The actions described in this section seem to depend on the taken-for-granted understanding that end users might decide on what may or not appear on their news feeds by engaging in *visual boundary-making*, motivated by multiple reasons. These digital boundaries seem to be understood as affecting the *possibility of seeing*, helping the definition of what is in/out, but not as determining what will *indeed* appear in people's news feeds. Hence, Joaquim's statement at the beginning of this chapter that he has "*some*" control. These boundaries are imagined, also, as involving pros and cons, costs

and gains. All of these calculations can be of huge importance insofar as they encompass relationships with not only distant others (complete strangers, acquaintances) but also intimate relations (family, co-workers, real-life friends). As such, these boundaries might reaffirm other and deeper non-Facebook boundaries, such as socioeconomic boundaries.

6.2.3. Entanglement of Visibility Vectors as Compliance

In the previous two sections, I proposed that the readability and sight vectors of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime might be assumed to be under the relative control of end users. Building on the accounts analysed above, I suggest that the entanglement of these particularly imagined vectors appears to be imagined as a form of *compliance*. That is, by providing certain control tools, whereby users decide, in part, about how they see and are seen, the algorithmic visibility regime is assumed as obeying their visual boundary-making. If they click the "Unfollow" button, they will *not* see more content on that profile/page in their news feed; if they decide to "See First" a page, they *will* see that page first. The assumption seems to be that there is no space for interpretations by algorithms.

Such compliance looks to be conceived as certain, but not as unmediated. The descriptions on which I commented, arguably imply assumptions about various other elements. Firstly, the very configuration of the interface buttons. It appears to go without saying for interviewees that this configuration allows for only some (and not other) kinds of control, which are limited to the sort of "blunt" visual boundary-making about which Gael complained. Secondly, there are user's personal resources and self-understandings. Important evidence of who in Joaquim's view can be listened to by the regime is his use of the expression "acting" to refer to the human action that affects algorithms' "behaviours". In Portuguese, even more than in English, "acting" is synonymous with performance. As such, it necessarily entails users' intentions and skills. Thirdly, this process involves particular assumptions about who and what are the recipients of one's boundary-making actions and whether these recipients can be aware of such actions. The presumption that different individuals combine differently with different buttons pervades all descriptions, but is particularly clear in Gael's description of who is "blockable" and who is merely "unfollowable". Bearing upon these qualifications is not only what other people do on Facebook, but also non-Facebook ties such as social class, as exemplified in Alvaro's and Olivia's stories. Put another way, some sort of broader understanding precedes their social imaginaries about what can and should be done to steer the sight vector.

6.2.4. Controllable Visibility Imaginary: A User-Centred Normative Order

In sum, the imaginations discussed in this first part of the chapter comprise what I would term *controllable visibility imaginary*. In line with this, Facebook's visibility regime is designed to allow end users to exert some control over itself through interface buttons which comply with their wishes about which visual boundaries should be instantiated in the platform. The descriptions examined above suggest an underlying sense of normative order centred on users' abilities to decide about how the regime works. The interviewees seem to indicate that they assume to have the ability to decide unilaterally about how they will make others visible and make themselves visible to others (including to the interface buttons, which are conceived of as needing to be actively clicked to generate the data that may be created by Facebook). However, this control is conceived as relative; as indicated just above, interviewees *also* take for granted that that their wishes can only be expressed according to formats pre-determined by the platform. That only rarely was this channelling made explicit by interviewees (e.g. Gael) seems an indication of how naturalized datafication operations appear to have become.

6.3.1. 'That Thing that Monitors Us': The Readability Vector as Eavesdropping

Following the order in the first part of this chapter, I begin this second part by analysing another way that participants seem to imagine the readability vector. In this next social imaginary that emerged in my analysis, Facebook is again conceived as underpinned by "the algorithm" (or its variegated cognate terms), and again understood as central to understanding how visibility is governed on the platform. However, this invocation differs significantly from the controllable visibility imaginary. Julia, the freelance journalist, described this difference:

> [6.10] I believe that what determines [what appears on her news feed] is... what is the name of that stuff? That thing that monitor us... the algorithm. I believe it is like a tool to know how the interactions of the user are, it's possible to know what he clicks on, what he accesses, what his interests are. Then, it [the algorithm] controls what will appear in our page [news feed], as well as what it [the algorithm] puts in [the news feed] in terms of ads.

Consider, also, what Octavio, the cultural producer, told me:

> [6.11] It is a digital reading, I mean, is not about what you are really seeing. It is a reading that they do of your behaviours.

In Julia's statement, the notion that the behaviour of Facebook's algorithmic system can be controlled directly by end users, central to the controllable visibility imaginary, largely vanishes. For Julia, algorithms are a "thing that monitor us", a "tool to know" people like her. "The algorithm" is

pictured as not *controlling* Julia's actions, but as *monitoring* actions performed by her. Also, her monitored actions are not necessarily linked to her direct wishes about what should be in or out of her news feed. Instead of clicks on buttons such as "Block" and "Unfollow", the algorithm is described as computing their "interactions", "clicks" and "access". As Octavio said, this "digital reading" is not necessarily interested in what one explicitly demonstrates interest ("what you are really seeing"), but in all sorts of other "behaviours".

Indeed, in this second imaginary, computational reading processes were often depicted as pervasive, touching everything that happens on the interface and, sometimes, reaching beyond the confines of the interface – as if Facebook had tentacles. More frequently, this sense of constant vigilance was implied in descriptions about how advertisements users believed were generated outside of the platform, kept appearing on their Facebook's news feeds (see examples in Section 5.2.1.). Nevertheless, some participants were able to articulate this apparent feeling in more explicit terms. The private tutor Alvaro provided an instance of the latter when explaining what he thinks "the algorithm" is:

> [6.12] I believe it is about… the kinds of posts I 'like', probably some keywords of the texts I write. It's also about the interaction between Facebook and the other things I use, like Google, other websites I access, it [the algorithm] might have access to the cookies [in his computer], so... It's also probably related with the groups I participate [in Facebook], I believe it [the algorithm] has a kind of complex dataset. It [the algorithm] is like an interaction between a lot of information they collect about me. What I click on, what I write, other websites I go to, the groups I'm part of, my 'friends', the posts I comment on, I think that... Not sure if it [the algorithm] is as apprehensible to me in a very specific way.

Alvaro's account points to an aspect that was mentioned by other participants: "the algorithm", or similar terms, are described as instantiating the various imagined linkages that Facebook is thought of as having with other spaces or functionalities of the Internet ("Google, other websites… cookies"). In effect, "the algorithm" is so much defined by this relatedness that it is even described by him *as* "an interaction" of "a lot of information collected" by a number of dataveillance operations ("they") which cannot be easily turned off. It is about what he clicks on, writes about, accesses, his Facebook groups – but also his "friends", what he comments on in which posts and… what else?, Alvaro seems to wonder. Consequently, the functioning of "the algorithms" is imagined as too complex to be fully "apprehensible". Which is, of course, a form of apprehending what the algorithm is.

My interpretation of these excerpts suggests what appears to be a second social understanding of the readability sector, in which Facebook seems to be conceived of as secretly spying on them – a form of *eavesdropping*. In contrast to the first imaginary, in which control over the readability vector is made possible by interface buttons, which are voluntarily clicked on by users themselves, this computational reading is assumed as not limited by these buttons, much less directed by end users' wishes. At the same time, the controller-controlled relationship is not fully inverted. While no clear sense of control over the regime is noticeable in the statements examined in this section, there did not seem to be any assumption about a complete lack of control either. Next, I consider how the sight vector seems to be assumed to work vis-à-vis this differently imagined readability vector.

6.3.2. 'It Becomes a Snowball': The Sight Vector as Automated Placement

This section offers an examination of interviewees' descriptions which point to an understanding of the sight vector as controlled by the platform itself – but still based on end users' datafied actions. The kind of definition of the feed executed by Facebook's algorithms seems to be understood by participants as rather different from how they understand what in Section 6.2.2 I termed visual boundary-making. If, in the controllable visibility imaginary, interviewees described their decisions about how to configure their feed as based on emotional (avoiding conflict, maintaining relationships), informational (being exposed to quality content) and political (downgrading the "reach" of rivals) reasons, in this second social imaginary the platform is portrayed as informed by end users' prior interactions. This is noticeable in Julia's description, presented in the last section, in which "the algorithm" is described as guided by "what" end users do. However, on many occasions, participants described that the quantity of interactions was as important as their quality. The video-maker Amanda was talking about "the algorithm" when she said:

> [6.13] Like, when a lot of people share the same things, I think it appears [in her news feed]. [The algorithm] might be like a formula […], it measures, like, the number of the words that you say or the number of times you Interact with someone. That is what I imagine.

In Amanda's quote, the algorithm is a "formula" (itself a mathematical term) that defines what is going to appear in the news feed through the counting of actions ("the number of words" and "number of times you interact", which algorithms' "measure"). This might mean that the number of times *she* interacts with a content will make this content more likely to appear in her news feed; but it might mean, also, that how *others* interact with a content plays a part, as suggested in the first part

of her account ("when a lot of people share the same things, I think it appears [in her news feed]"). The latter idea was made even more explicit to me by Adão, the high-school teacher:

> [6.14] I'm not sure what comes first, the chicken or the egg. But the higher the number of 'likes', the higher the number of people that will 'like' it. If a text has a small number of 'likes', people might think: 'Um, why is that nobody is 'liking' it?'. They, like, go with the flow in this sense.

Antonio, the real estate agent, provided a similar example:

> [6.15] When everybody starts to 'like' [a content], it becomes a snowball. The 'like' is everything. I believe the 'like' rules – if somebody 'liked' something, then other people will get curious and might 'like' it as well.

Adão and Antonio seem to believe that, by privileging quantity of interactions in its government of the sight vector, Facebook's visibility regime commonly creates what Antonio calls a "snowball" effect: the more interactions a content has, the more people will see this content, which might, in turn, create more interactions, and so on. This assumption about how Facebook places content applies not only to others' contents but also to content produced by the participant herself, it seems. In conjunction with Amanda's narrative, their descriptions exemplified an aspect that all participants appear to share: governing of the sight vector by "the algorithm" (or "Facebook", "thing", "system" etc.) is not a "sledgehammer" that creates "blunt" binaries: yes/not, in/out, as indicated by Gael in the first part of this chapter. Rather, she seemed to suggest that it is driven by categorical and measurement variables: both the "what" and the "how many" are taken into account. In principle, any content that achieves a certain combination of these variables might end up being shown to her by "the algorithm". The process of deciding what is seen by whom seems, then, to be taken as rather malleable, produced by a complex dynamics of computer calculations and the social calculations of end user (Gillespie, 2017), who might "go with the flow" in Adão's words.

This is not to say that interviewees did not identify patterns in the decisions of the platform. In fact, many participants told me that these automated decisions ultimately give rise to audiences organized by Facebook. Again, they frequently used the "bubble" image to designate these audiences. As Victor, a clerk in a cultural centre who spoke at length about "algorithms", said:

> [6.16] This bubble would be, like ... you use the social network, you are posting and sharing things that you think are right. Other people start to think these things are okay too, they start to 'like' these things as well. The points of view start to get closer. Whatever

you post will appear more often for them; as the 'friends' of this person will see that she always 'likes' your stuff, they begin to get closer to you too.

His depiction of a "bubble" is illustrative of two understandings expressed by other participants. For Victor, "the algorithm" brings end users together regardless of their desire to actually see each other. All he did was interact with certain posts. In his description, "the bubble" is like a network, a shapeshifting set of connections not only between individuals who are already linked to each other but also between strangers ("friends" of "friends"). This "bubble" is assumed to be created by the platform, and not by him – as it would be in the controllable visibility imaginary. However, instead of a fixed assumption of sameness, for Victor "the algorithm" appears to a follow a temporal and interactional logic: definitions about what to place where in the news feed are driven by the assumption that what users "liked" in the past is what users might "like" in the future. Artur, the documentarist, told me something similar:

[6.17] There's a lot of people who believe in conspiracy theories behind this algorithm, that there are even political issues involved. I tend to think this is not the case. I believe it is a much more sophisticated mechanism: its greater goal is to please me, I think so. The objective is not to manipulate information, or censor something, I don't think so. So, like, if I post a cat pic, I'll get a cat pic. If I post conservative news, I'll get conservative news. So, it tries to guess what I like.

For Artur, the behaviour of the algorithm has nothing to do with politics, manipulation or censoring and, thus, is not explainable by "conspiracy theories" – a point to which the third part of this chapter returns. Its intentions are both simpler and "more sophisticate": it merely wants to "please" him.

Other participants said that Facebook does not only want to please people but also get them hooked – articulating a view that resembled Seaver's (2018) theorization of algorithmic recommendation system as "traps". As Fernanda, the engineer, said:

[6.18] The algorithm is… I believe that it works in a way that… it wants to get you addicted.

This view seems to imply that the sight vector may be taken as being guided by concerns common to other private companies when creating their products. This was made explicit by Benjamin, a junior consultant:

[6.19] The algorithm, I think, is like a mechanism that social networks have and Facebook has as well and the objective number one of it is making money. Making money. Money, money!

Not all participants talked openly about "pleasing" clients so as to get "money" – Benjamin, Fernanda and Artur looked like particularly attuned to the political economy of the platform. However, no participant seemed to ignore the fact that Facebook was a for-profit company; for many of them, this appeared to go without saying. This understanding was able to co-exist, at least for some interviewees, with the assumption that Facebook may *also* be guided explicitly by political goals in the definition of what appears or not in the news feed – as Section 6.4.2 will propose.

Underlying these descriptions and explanations, I suggest, is the understanding of the sight vector of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime as a form of *automated placement*. If, in the first imaginary, this vector refers to the definition of the *possibility* of seeing, in this second one, it is understood as defining the *facticity of seeing*, of what will *indeed* appear in one's news feed by the platform itself. Automated placement does not *necessarily* contradict end users' will. Interviewees appear to think that Facebook tries to interpret their datafied actions to offer them what it is they want. The nature of this assumed interpretation is made clearer in the next section.

6.3.3. The Entanglement of Visibility Vectors as Wish Prediction

If both the reading and sight vectors are conceived of differently by users compared to the first social imaginary, it is no surprise that how they are intertwined is also quite distinctly imagined, as described below. This distinction can be intuited from the accounts analysed in the previous section, but is illustrated even more clearly by what Bernardo, the public employee, told me:

> [6.20] I believe Facebook has an…um, how do you say it? An intelligence area that verifies what you like or don't like. I believe these reactions, 'like', 'love', 'wow', are totally related [to this verification]. I believe Facebook sees what people… Facebook is the largest base of personal data in the planet, so I believe they have the means to verify what people want and do not want to see.

Bernardo does not use the term "algorithm", but does think of Facebook as having an "intelligence area", an expression that is illustrative of this second imaginary. This "area", he believes, examines some "means" ("data" about "reactions", like "love" and "wow") to "verify" what end users "want" to see. Thus, the relationship between the readability (eavesdropping) and the sight (automated placement) vectors seems to be the consequence of a kind of knowledge that Facebook produces from end users' behavioural data. While the compliance I described in Section 6.2.3 presumes end users' capacity to command the platform to construct certain visual boundaries, here, the platform is described as having interpretive latitude. This knowledge might be described as objective – something that might be "verified" simply, as Bernardo says. However, its objectivity is not

self-evident: it demands some form of "intelligence" to be revealed. At the same time, Facebook does not seem to be imagined as imposing what people will see. It seems that this intertwining is not conceived as arbitrary, but as lending to this imagined algorithmic visibility regime some legitimacy from the interviewees' standpoint. By "legitimacy", I do not mean an ethical judgment, but rather a sense that Facebook has the technically-grounded capacity to know "what people want" to see (as Bernardo described it). This process of discovery could be understood as erroneous – Section 5.2.2 presented some examples of algorithmic decisions which were understood by interviewees as mistakes. Nonetheless, it is understood as the consequence of an "intelligent", scientific procedure.

This second social imaginary seems to share with the first the understanding that the dimensions of seeing and reading are intertwined. However, if, in the controllable visibility imaginary, this entanglement is taken to be a function of users' intentions, in this second imaginary it seems to be assumed to be a function of users' *predicted wishes*. That is, the eavesdropping on various kinds of actions by the platform is conceived as allowing Facebook to predict (correctly or not) what users would wish to see in their news feeds were they able to decide for themselves. If, in the controllable visibility imaginary, "compliance" appeared to be understood as influenced not only by the design of interface buttons but also by the interviewees' own subjective understandings, in this second imaginary, the intertwining of how actions are read so as to construct the news feeds seems to be imagined as affected by an external social reality of computationally mineable interactions.

6.3.4. Predictive Visibility Imaginary: A Data-centred Normative Order

To sum up, this social imaginary's key assumption can be characterized as the idea that Facebook is designed incessantly to eavesdrop (quantitively and qualitatively) on a plethora of users' actions, with the aim of predicting end users' wishes about what they want to see. This prediction, then, is acted upon to place, in an automated manner, certain contents in a certain order in the news feed.

The second imaginary seems to hinge on what might be called a *data-centred normative order*. The regime, I propose, is not assumed as driven by any particular axiological understanding or presumption about what end users ought or not to see. What is best for people to see, it seems, is what people's previous datafied actions suggest that they would like to see again. That this social imaginary seems to be understood as devoid of explicit normative judgment by the platform does not mean that it is devoid of normative significance. It does imply an assumption about end users' abilities to decide how they are made visible, I suggest. In this imaginary, end users do not seem to be

understood as having certain and definite control over the reading and sight vectors or how they become entangled. Sections 7.3 and 8.3 discuss how this assumption often leads participants to transform how they act to attempt to influence the visibility regime, a highly consequential decision for the exercise of civic voice on Facebook.

The next set of sections examines the third – and last – set of implicit assumptions about how visibility is governed on Facebook which emerged from the analysis of my interviews.

6.4.1. 'You Have no Control': The Readability Vector as Exploitation

In the two social imaginaries discussed above, the readability vector appears to be understood as somehow limited, either to interface buttons (controllable visibility imaginary) or by Facebook and its various connections with other platforms and software (predictive visibility imaginary). This section analyses interview excerpts that suggest that this vector may be assumed, also, as seemingly boundless.

Laura, a freelance journalist, said:

> [6.21] Companies have an intelligence system that has access to everything that is shared about them [on Facebook]. You have no control. And [there's always] someone who knows someone, who knows someone. The world is very small. Like the trainee who shared [on Facebook] what he was doing [in the company] – something, like, really internal [to the company] – and he was fired.

Laura's quote illustrates imaginations about being read on Facebook which differ from those examined above. She believes that the end users are susceptible to external organizations ("companies") able to visibilize various users' actions ("everything") using their own "intelligence system[s]". Given the context of our conversation, Laura was probably referring to "social media measurement", a practice that monitors mentions to brands which has become a basic service offered by public relations companies for about ten years.[54] In Laura's comment, the meaning of "intelligence" has less to do with algorithmic prediction (cf. Bernardo's – Excerpt 6.20) than with dataveillance. Her description does not single out any particular "company". It seems that, for her, any end user is potentially dataveillable to any "company" that can afford to pay for the service or with the technical skills to execute similar operations. As she put it: "you have no control". While dataveillance processes are an integral part of the controllable and predictive imaginaries discussed in Sections 6.1 and 6.2, the assumption that the platform's data are somehow accessible to third-parties suggests an

[54] See, e.g. Bekkers, Edwards, & de Kool (2013).

increased degree of exposure, which, I suggest, is typical of this third social imaginary of the Facebook visibility regime.

Imaginations about third-parties were not limited to private companies concerned about their particular brands. Other participants cited other actors which, they appeared to think, extract data from Facebook in order to monitor end users. Some examples: Alex, an IT professional, told me that progressive political parties use what he described as "big data" to "probe the environment"; Maria, the events organizer, told me that Google "without a doubt" uses Facebook data; the IT professional Jair said that the group of alleged "hackers" Anonymous "certainly is monitoring". More generally, interviewees referred to agents of the Brazilian state. This category of actor was often described in somewhat vague terms ("the government"), but when probed, some participants identified particular agents, such as marketers under contract to governments (e.g. Joaquim, the script writer) and, in particular, the police. According to Vicente, the theatre teacher, for instance, the police had sent him a suspicious email after his participation on a protest organized through Facebook.[55]

Other participants appear to believe that *multiple* state actors observe their actions, through different reading practices. Take what I was told by Davi, the English teacher:

> [6.22] Oh, that is for sure, the [political] parties of the left, the ABIN [the Brazilian federal intelligence agency] are monitoring this [Facebook], our chats, they see everything. But we [conservative people] do not offer any danger, we are not talking about planting bombs or anything, we are not violent. But we are monitored, all the time. There are undercover agents in our [Facebook] groups. And it is possible to monitor someone stealthily. Suppose I worked at an intelligence agency or for dominant groups, what do I'd do? I'd find out if I have a relative that is in one of our groups and this relative tells me everything, I don't even need to be added to this group. Some people get into the groups with a different identity. It's easy.

Davi's narrative is not about *data*veillance. In his description, more important than computational methods are the "undercover agents", who seem to be like human spies operating in Facebook groups and chats. These agents, Davi appears to believe, plant and cultivate human sources of information (e.g. a "relative") that can tell them "everything" that is discussed in those seemingly private spaces. While this supposed strategy is reminiscent of pre-digital surveillance, the digital environment seems essential in the excerpt, since it facilitates adoption of fake identities ("it's easy"). Similar understandings were narrated by other participants. In this view, Facebook's design, ultimately, is unable to allow users to differentiate real from fake profiles. This creates a loophole,

[55] I discuss further how the police or police officers were described by some interviewees as able to visibilize their actions on Facebook in Sections 8.2.3 and 8.3.5.

which can be utilized by actors with contestable purposes – including one of my interviewees as I show in Section 7.2.3.

Imaginaries about this form of manual digital surveillance were common to most of the interviews. When specified by interviewees, they often involved not "undercover agents", as in Davi's description, but more mundane usages of digital technologies. In particular, the taking of screenshots (*prints*, in Brazilian Internet slang) to register and circulate the instantiation of an interface. When explaining who can visibilize what she writes about politics on Facebook, the nurse Patricia told me:

> [6.23] Let's say, if I discuss a topic with someone, someone else might take a screenshot of that story, this can happen.

Another example is Lorena, the dancer. She said that she "know[s]" that police officers use "prints" to monitor and single-out certain protesters.

> [6.24] There are WhatsApp groups, in which they [police officers] exchange ['prints']. If the police officer finds the Facebook [profile] of a girl who did something in a demonstration against him [the police officer], he will 'print' [the Facebook profile] and he will fetch her.

The ability to take screenshots might be understood as inherently digital. However, they do not involve computational analysis of any data and do not require sophisticated skills – anyone can do it or can learn quickly how to do it.

Although only a few interviewees seem to believe that they are both dataveilled by third-parties *and* manually read through end users' practices such as screen-shooting (*printing*), all participants described at least one of these two forms of reading. I suggest that these described understandings share a similar implicit assumption: that Facebook is designed in such a way that it can be *exploited* by a multitude of non-Facebook actors willing to advance their own, often malicious agendas. I next examine a third imagination of the sight vector.

6.4.2. 'Facebook is Communist': The Sight Vector as Political Censorship

Consider what Luis, the politically conservative pensioner who had become heavily involved in online political discussions about the crisis, told me:

> [6.25] Their algorithms, they [Facebook] have the secrets of what to put into them. In determinate moments, immediately before the impeachment [of Brazil's former president, Dilma Rousseff in 2016], for instance, amid that high tension, it was clear

> that you could not criticize *PT* [Workers' Party] and Lula [da Silva, Brazil's former President and Dilma's ally]. Some posts disappeared; fan pages were blocked. So, there is this possibility, João, that Mr. Zuckerberg is aligned with globalist policies, the same of policies of people like [George] Soros. [Facebook might even change the algorithm] at the request of the Brazilian government. They have the contacts of the government, don't they? It got clear at that moment, in which there was this huge tension, [that Facebook helped the *PT*]. They change the algorithm, but how exactly this relationship happens, this perverse relationship between globalists and the government, this is hard [to know]… So, this algorithm is like the Coke's formula, they change it all the time. If you post something from YouTube on Facebook, it is not always that [other people will see]. There is this algorithm that says: 'Hey, you're posting too much from YouTube and taking [away users] from here [Facebook]'. […] And keywords. If you say 'PT', or, 'Out With *PT*', 'Dilma', it [the algorithm] will make it harder for you. The algorithm seeks them [these words]. It monitors you. [But] until a certain moment, when things are normal, it shows you what you like.

Luis's characterization of how "the algorithm" constructs the news feed is markedly different from what was suggested in the first two sections of this chapter. Instead of a compliant mechanism which obeys end users' pre-defined wishes (controllable visibility imaginary), or an intelligent system able to predict people's unspoken wishes about what they want to see (predictive visibility imaginary), "the algorithm" was presented by Luis as a mysterious tool ("the Coke's formula"), which is changed "all the time" to arbitrarily delete posts, block pages and fetch keywords ("Dilma"), with the goal of hampering the range of right-wing messages (it "will make it harder for you"). The reason for this is less commercial than ideological. In Luis's words, Mark Zuckerberg, founder and CEO of the platform, might be aligned to "globalists" as (in his view) the billionaire and philanthropist George Soros and the Brazilian government. It seems that, for Luis, end users are prevented from seeing some posts. Not because these posts were being blocked from view by other users (as in the first imaginary), and less because they did not attract a sufficient number of interactions (as in the second imaginary), but because they contradicted the political plans of a set of "globalist" actors. At the same time, Luis believes that this sort of strategy is employed only at politically fraught moments – for example, "immediately before the impeachment". Otherwise, "when things are normal, it shows you what you like".

Although most of Luis's quote relates to the news feed algorithms, there is a hint that similar actions are applied to the platform's content moderation system ("fanpages were blocked"). This was commented on by other participants. Fabricio, the telemarketer, said:

> [6.26] When you publish something criticizing gays, you're blocked, 30 days minimum on Facebook. But if they ['lefties'] publish the image of a homosexual violating a crucifix, it stays there, you see? As if it were a normal thing.

[JCM] How do you think this blocking system works?

They [Facebook] got a meeting with Jean Willys [a progressive and gay Brazilian politician], and Jean Willys posted on Facebook. 'I met today with the administrators of Facebook'. Eduardo Bolsonaro [one of the sons of Jair Bolsonaro] tried to contact them [Facebook], but never heard back. Jean Willys has a verified page. [Once,] they managed to take down Jean Willys's page, but he was able to recover it within one hour. Then he posted: 'Do not worry, fascists may try to overthrow me, but we've all set up', something like that. And you realize that Facebook has this characteristic of the left, politically correct, communist, that curtails the freedom of the people who are conservative.

Consider also what Maria, the politically conservative event organizer I mentioned earlier in the chapter, said:

[6.27] Facebook has its own rules, and we complain about it. If it's up to the *Foicebook* [to define how visibility is managed], then it is tough. If a leftie curses at us, smear us, the motherfucker remains there [in Facebook], alive and kicking. Now, if I curse back, if I say 'faggot', then I'm taken down. This is what everybody complains about these punishments. We say that this is censorship by Facebook.

Maria's and Fabricio's descriptions reinforce and add other elements to Luis's comments. The described plot to undermine the messages of conservative end users on the platform appears to involve not only ideological tweaking of the algorithm but also real-life secret contacts between Facebook executives and certain progressive Brazilian politicians (e.g. Jean Willys), which, thus, benefit from stronger protection ("verified page", quick page recovery). Underlying Maria's and Fabricio's descriptions is a sense of unfairness. As Maria said, a "leftie" had a free pass to spread hate speech and "smear" conservatives, but conservatives are punished for the slightest transgression of Facebook "rules" – that is, the so-called "Community Standards" which guide the platform's content moderation. For Maria, content moderation is less an attempt to enforce these rules, than a straightforward kind of political "censorship". This presumed censorship seems to be understood as so widespread that Maria and her conservative friends ("we") have created the nickname, "*Foice*book", to describe the platform's political bias. The word "foice", Portuguese for "sickle", is an allusion to the Bolshevik Hammer and Sickle symbol. This sort of description was particularly common amongst conservative interviewees. It seems that, during my fieldwork, I captured the exposition of ordinary Brazilians to theories on how platforms discriminate against conservatives[56] (see also Excerpt 5.42).

[56] A version of the same idea was articulated later by American President Donald Trump (Stewart, 2018a).

However, progressive participants expressed similar concerns. Telma, the musician, suggested that "the American government" may have a say in how Facebook "censors" certain information via the same system of content moderation – which she referred to as "censorship". I then asked:

[6.28] [JCM] Do you think Facebook has a political stance on this 'censorship'?

> Facebook itself I'm not sure. It must have some connection with the American government. Somehow the CIA, the FBI, they have access to everything.

Octavio, the cultural producer, indicated that content moderation might be informed by a "conspiracy" to undermine shirtless transgender men.

[6.29] It censors the photos, it blocks people. Or those who did mastectomy. I hate these conspiracy theories. I think it's counterproductive. But on the other hand, we cannot be totally innocent. They are companies, they have interests. Everything fits, that's it. We start to realize that there is a control.

Why would the CIA and the FBI be interested in "censoring" Facebook content produced by Brazilian end users? What "conspiracy theory" (see also Section 5.3.1) explains Facebook's "censoring" of pictures of transgender men – including those who have undergone mastectomy? This was unclear, although throughout the interviews I probed these ideas. Octavio referred to other, shadowy "interests" at play in the definition of what appears on Facebook's news feed. The fact that neither of these individuals could explain completely what they meant is, I propose, less a product of the individual inability to explain their thoughts and more a defining aspect of this apparently common imagination. Many participants were suspicious, but no-one seemed certain about what they were suspicious of. It seems that it is not that the platform represents a specific ideology, as the descriptions of right-wing participants above would contend, but rather that Facebook is assumed to be somehow associated to other powerful entities. As Telma put it, there "must" be a connection between the platform and archetypical conspiratorial organizations such as the CIA. Her choice of the CIA is not completely odd. As in other Latin American countries that endured Cold War military dictatorships, Brazilian progressives are educated to believe that the 1964 military coup d'état was orchestrated by the CIA.[57] Octavio's ambivalence about what he terms "conspiracies theories" suggests a similar apprehension; he does not want to believe in them, but is not certain that not believing is an option.

The implicit assumption that might be said to underpin the quotes examined in this section is that Facebook operates a form *political censorship* when constructing end users' news feed – at least

[57] See Arão Reis (2014).

in regard to certain content and at certain moments. Some interviewees associated this presumed willingness to censor content to conspiracies with other powerful actors. In some cases, these conspiracies seemed quite specific (e.g. with a particular politician); in others, they seem to be based on a revealing vagueness and older conspiratorial imaginaries. Importantly, while all participants appeared to assume that Facebook is a space that might be exploited by third-parties (readability vector, see previous section), not everyone described ideas, actions or events that suggested political censorship (sight vector, this section). However, since this third imaginary does not seem to be defined by the entanglement of these two vectors (next section), one needs not hold assumptions about both of vectors to be understood as holding this imaginary.

6.4.3. A Missing Entanglement

In Section 3.6.2, I defined Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime as characterized by the intertwining of two vectors (readability and sight). In the imaginaries explored in Sections 6.2 and 6.3 in this chapter, this intertwining seems to be considered either as a form of *compliance* (controllable visibility imaginary) or what I call *wish prediction* (predictive visibility imaginary). The accounts examined in this third part indicate that this link was not necessarily imagined by interviewees. Being read by third-parties and other end users does not appear to directly influence the configuration of interviewees' news feeds. Likewise, the idea that Facebook allegedly censors certain content based on its political preferences, is informed (but not determined) by how end users are read. That is, a post must be datafied before Facebook can decide whether or not to "censor" it, according to the interviewees. However, this decision seems to be the consequence of political ideologies and conspiracies, not of end users' wishes or the data themselves (as in controllable and predictive imaginaries, respectively). Therefore, there appears to be an unspoken assumption of a *lack of entanglement* between readability and sight.

This separation has important consequences for this third social imaginary of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime. The regime seems to be conceived as comprising episodic exploitations and idiosyncratic acts of censorships. In this sense, what defines this other imaginary is not only the seeming impossibility for end users to influence how visibility is governed but also the assumption about the apparent non-existence of a single power centre in the regime. Not even Facebook seems to occupy this position. Its visibility regime emerges, from the descriptions analysed in the two previous sections, as porous to other logics not defined by the platform: the goals of third-parties when extracting data from the platform, people's willingness to take screenshots of posts or to pretend to be somebody else on Facebook, political ideologies and conspiracies. In this view, Facebook

might be running the space, but is not fully in command of it. Therefore, it could be said that there *is* an imagined visibility regime – assumed patterns of readability (exploitation) and sight (political censorship). However, this imagined regime hardly fits my theorization of algorithmic visibility regime (Section 3.6.2). Let me now propose a definition for this third imaginary.

6.4.6. Uncontrollable Visibility Imaginary: A User-Excluding Normative Order

Drawing on the examples explored in this third part, it could be suggested that, while the two vectors do not appear to be imagined by the interviewees as entangled, they share a common imagined trait: the lack of the possibility of control over them by the interviewees. In this *uncontrollable visibility imaginary*, as I call it, end users do not appear able to conceive ways to influence how they are read or seen/see on Facebook.

As such, this social imaginary implies a sense of normative order from which end users, as agents, essentially are excluded. More than being only unable to determine how Facebook eavesdrops on their actions, as seen in the predictive visibility imaginary, end users appear to picture themselves, also, as ultimately unable to know *who* may read them on the platform. As control over their visibility is unimaginable from within the platform, various interviewees realized that leaving Facebook, that is, not engaging at all with its visibility regime, was the only way to have some kind of say about how the platform visibilizes them – this will become clearer in Sections 7.4.1 and 7.4.2.

6.5. Conclusion

This chapter presents the empirical findings with regard to which social imaginaries of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime the interviewees appeared to hold. My findings indicate that the regime is imagined from three distinct perspectives, whose cardinal features seem to be shared by all participants. I call them *controllable, predictive* and *uncontrollable* visibility imaginaries. Following the conceptual framework, these labels refer to how individuals understand the platform's capacity to control how they are read and seen/see. I suggest that the first imaginary is marked by a user-centred sense of normative order (Section 6.2.4). Users are assumed to be able to decide whether and when they are read by the platform (Section 6.2.1) and to use this reading to make visual boundaries, and choose who is outside and within their visual field (Section 6.2.2). In the second imagined regime, this kind of automatic compliance with end users' wishes (Section 6.2.3) is replaced by what I term a data-centred sense of normative order (Section 6.3.4). Facebook is assumed to be incessantly eavesdropping users' actions (Section 6.3.1) to predict what they want to see (Section 6.3.3) and to construct their news feeds accordingly (Section 6.3.2). Finally, in the last imaginary, no

possibility of control seems conceivable for end users (Section 6.4.3), either with regard to how they are read by a multitude of actors (not only the platform – Section 6.4.1) or to how Facebook engages in presumed political censorship (Section 6.4.2). The normative order of this uncontrollable visibility imaginary seems, thus, to be defined by the exclusion from it of end users (Section 6.4.4).

This chapter underlines the differences between these social imaginaries, which are not mutually exclusive. They seem to be associated with particular forms of visibility operations and, thus, with different forms of visibility control. Mostly, they coexist. In Chapters 7 and 8, I illustrate this in greater depth. The controllable visibility imaginary establishes only some basic regime boundaries, which partially constrain the predictive visibility imaginary and both coexist with the full-blown uncertainty of the uncontrollable visibility imaginary. This is because this latter is operated either by non-Facebook actors (in the case of its readability vector) or tends only to affect the functioning of the regime in specific moments (in the case of its sight vector). Indeed, the three imaginaries seem to share some basic assumptions: that Facebook's news feed is a malleable space; that an invisible computational infrastructure (often called "the algorithm") informs such malleability (even when not determining it); and that such reading is (at the least partially) designed to advance Facebook's own goals. Conceptually, the most important shared aspect of these three imaginaries is their *sociomateriality*.

Before describing in in Section 9.3 what I mean by this, I analyse the relative role played by the three social imaginaries examined in this Chapter in interviewees' attempt to control the visibility of their civic voice expressions on Facebook. Chapter 7 begins this work by considering attempts to increase this visibility.

Chapter 7

Visibility Expansion Projects

7.1. Introduction

Chapter 6 analysed the three non-mutually exclusive social imaginaries of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime that interviewees seemed to share. I called them *controllable*, *predictive* and *uncontrollable visibility* imaginaries.

The present chapter begins the empirical analysis of how these social imaginaries shape participants' civic voice expressions on Facebook – an investigation that continues in Chapter 8. In so doing, this chapter starts to consider the civic ramifications of Facebook's datafication power more closely. Section 3.6.3 proposed that these civic implications could be studied through what I defined as *visibility control projects*. Based on Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) notion of agency and on the concept of civic voice, I theorized visibility control projects as attempts by end users to achieve two goals: define how their civic voice expressions are visibilized (seen/read), and ensure that these civic voice expressions are heard (recognized/not misrecognized) on Facebook. Also in Section 3.6.3, I formulated two basic kinds of visibility control projects – *visibility reduction projects* (which are examined in Chapter 8) and *visibility expansion projects* (which are examined in this chapter). Thus, I address here **SRQ 3.1: Do ordinary end users' attempt to expand the visibility of their civic voice expressions on Facebook? If so, is this attempt associated with how they articulate these expressions?**

In line with the strategies explained in Section 4.4.5, the empirical findings examined in this chapter arose from patterns found in interviewees' answers to my questions on whether and how they acted to enhance their visibility when expressing themselves politically on Facebook. I interpreted interviewees' descriptions to allow consideration of the relative role of the three social imaginaries of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime vis-à-vis interviewees' civic self-understandings. This allowed me to explore the continuations and tensions between the two goals of visibility control projects – being visibilized and being heard.

Most interviewees reported having used visibility expansion projects, but in two markedly different ways. In the first part of the chapter, I examine projects that did not entail changing interviewees' civic voice expressions. In the second part, I go on to analyse key examples of the multiple visibility expansion projects that did entail some form of transformation of these expressions.

Then, in the third and last part of the chapter, I consider accounts on why interviewees decided not to implement this sort of project. This and the next chapter (8) do not engage with the theoretical details of the notion of "project", as defined by Emirbayer and Mische (1998). This is done in Section 9.4, where I also consider to what extent the descriptions analysed in this and in the next chapter may be said to regard assumptions about the sight or the readability vector of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime.

7.2. Visibility Expansion Through the Control of Non-Civic Voice Elements

This first part of the chapter considers descriptions about visibility expansion projects that do not depend on altering civic voice expressions. My examination of interviewees' descriptions indicates five forms of projects, which I call *piggybacking, network expansion, voice multiplication, tactical self-interactions* and *temporal control*.

7.2.1. 'When I Want Views, I Publish in the Page': Visibility Expansion Through Piggybacking

Consider what I was told by Olivia, the editor:

> [7.1] Only when there's something important. Like the zika case [she is referring to the epidemic of zika virus in Brazil between 2016 and 2017]. It was in the media, but no-one was talking about it, because it was happening mostly in the Northeast [region of Brazil], [affecting] poor women. You feel kind of responsible. Then, I said, 'no, people have to know about this'. This is when I want something to get widely visualised. Then I publish in that page. The reach and the number of shares, it's enormous, I didn't understand this power, this force they [the page] have. And I started to like it, 'wow, I can write, people will listen to me'. [But] I rarely do it. Because, I've never been concerned with attracting 'likes'. I speak about the things I find interesting for other people to know. [But] this page has many followers, and then the haters come, people who attack you, send you aggressive messages. Mostly young folks, usually sexist boys, and it's like a persecution. Especially when it's a controversial theme, like abortion. They curse at me – 'whore', 'you mom should have aborted you', 'scum'. And they 'print' my stuff and put it on conservative Facebook pages. It's very tiring. I don't really respond, but it's no fun, logically.

If something is happening that people "have to know" about, Olivia will publish her post not on her own profile (which has "only" some thousands of "friends"), but on a Facebook page that has millions of followers, she said. In another part of our conversation, Olivia told me she is able to do this because its administrator invited her to write about woman's health and feminism. This could increase her visibility without needing her to expand her own network. In other words, she piggybacked on the page's "enormous" audience. Underlying this action is what I described in Chapter 6 as the controllable visibility imaginary, in which users assume that they can directly define how they see and are seen by others by using an interface functionality – here, not a button, but the very space of a

"page". By publishing on this page, Olivia expects to expand dramatically who is "in" the boundaries of her voice, creating the possibility of being seen a*nd heard* by millions of people ("And I started to like it, 'wow, I can write, people will listen to me'"). According to her description, she did not always try to increase her reach: it was only if she needed a post to achieve "a lot of views". From her example of the zika virus, which hit poorer parts of the Brazilian population disproportionately, it seems that the impetus to expand her visibility derives from her own political stance towards such social inequality ("You feel kind of responsible"). Thus, this project seems, at least initially, conducive to her civic self-understanding: by increasing her visibility, she feels she can be recognized as the citizen she wants to be.

However, the second part of her narrative nuances the first. Some "boys" or "haters", people to whom she would not normally be exposed in her "bubble" (a term she used at various moments of our conversation), harass her: "it's like a persecution". In addition to being abusive towards her, these "haters" will take screenshots (*prints*) of her "stuff" (most likely pictures and texts) and post them in conservative spaces on Facebook – probably to mock and insult her. This is why, Olivia suggests, that she "only rarely" will use the page that attracts millions of followers. This inaction is linked to Olivia's apparent assumption that, in trying to be seen, she may lose control over who can see her on Facebook, which is the central tenet of the uncontrollable visibility imaginary. An echo of this ambiguity can be identified in her response to my question about whether she thinks her civic voice is heard on the platform:

> [7.2] It's hard ... Sometimes, yes. But I question – isn't this just a massive annoyance? I see that some people read the post [on the page] to either agree or disagree, they come with a skewed understanding. Did what I said make any difference to them? Or those who agree with me already know all this, and those who disagree don't care? I've had some positive feedbacks, though.

The ambivalence engendered by her augmented reach seemed to have led her not only to question whether she should expand the exposure of her voice, but also to consider whether her civic voice was heard: was she respected as a citizen? Or was expressing herself politically "just a massive annoyance"? "Haters" seem beyond the possibility of dialogue; those who apparently listen to her did not appear to need her opinion. A definitive answer to my question is "hard", she said. The best approximation is ambiguity – "sometimes". This sort of ambivalence in regard to one's own civic worth on Facebook was expressed by various interviewees – including the documentarist, Artur, discussed next.

7.2.2. 'I Will Accept Everyone': Visibility Expansion Through Network Expansion

Artur told me about how his political usage of Facebook had changed over time:

> [7.3] In the beginning**,** my Facebook was, like, for those people I already knew. [But] when Facebook became a political business [for him, around 2014], I said, you know what? I will accept everyone. I think I deleted the personal pictures, maybe the picture albums as well. Then, I accepted everyone. I said, 'damn it, I'm not going to expose my personal life anyway, damn it if I don't know the person'. Then, with the political worsening [due to the crisis] I got pissed off because they [strangers] would come and bug me and then I stopped accepting everyone.

As the Brazilian political crisis progressed, Artur's Facebook profile, which once was mainly about personal and family topics, essentially became a "political business" – that is, a springboard for the expression of his civic voice. At this moment, Artur, who used to be selective about friendship requests, came up with a project based on a more banal functionality than posting in a page with millions of followers, as Olivia reported doing (see previous section). He simply started accepting strangers as "friends" even if they disagreed with him. He assumed that the broader his network, the more likely his voice would be heard. This project hinges on assumptions about the platform's algorithmic visibility regime that are typical of the controllable visibility imaginary.

However, similar to Olivia, this project triggered experiences and reflections that modulated his expectations of being recognized. Apparently afraid of having non-political elements of his profile maliciously exploited by strangers he accepted as "friends", Artur deleted some albums of family pictures so as not to expose his "personal life". However, these actions did not stop these strangers from bugging him and making him "pissed off", which led to Artur abandoning the project. Such change relates, of course, to a different imaginary of the platform's visibility regime – that of uncontrollable visibility. While the emotional charge in his narrative is less intense than in Olivia's, Artur appears to have experienced a similar contradiction: his attempt to expand his reach engendered some lack of control over his voice. In view of the risks, he intentionally withdrew from the project ("I stopped accepting everyone"). This decision was part of a larger process of rethinking what it meant to be heard on Facebook, he told me:

> [7.4] After the impeachment [of former president Dilma Rousseff in 2016], [he realized that,] more than convincing people who don't agree with me, expressing yourself on Facebook is important to reinforce your own convictions and the people who already agree with you. Because in these moments of fragmentation, you feel you are losing comrades. I think people who don't agree with me may not have heard [my voice], but people who agree, they said 'oh, how good that Artur thinks like me, I'm not alone'. And then I decided to be part of this group of people who is not *Petista*

> [supporters of the Workers' Party] but which sees positive things in the Workers' Party governments.

It seems that, for Artur, engaging with strangers ceased to make sense. To be heard on Facebook came to mean not convincing those strangers who "do not agree with" him, but supporting and being supported by his leftist "comrades". It is difficult to dissociate this shift in his civic self-understanding from the negative experience of enacting his project. At the same time, this turn was likely also influenced by his diagnosis that leftists, like him, were in a moment of "fragmentation" after the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff – and, thus, in need of cohesion. It seems that, largely due to this recognition from peers on Facebook, he was able to rediscover himself as a moderate *Petista*, one of a "group of people" who are critical of, but not against, the Worker's Party.

The examples of Olivia and Artur suggest that trying to be seen by more people can lead to loss of control over aspects of civic voice. This association between controllability and uncontrollability was fairly common in the descriptions I collected during my fieldwork. However, as the next section indicates, this sort of project might include robbing *others* of control over their voices.

7.2.3. 'I Create Fake Profiles': Visibility Expansion Through Voice Multiplication

Fabricio is a Black man who lives in one of São Paulo's poorest shanty towns. Aged 23 years, he supports himself by taking phone calls in a telemarketing centre. However, this job is peripheral to his life: he told me that most of his time and thoughts are dedicated to engagement in conservative politics on Facebook. He intends to achieve sufficient influence to "break Brazil's establishment", he said. Fabricio seemed to believe that the kind of influence needed for this destruction relied on increasing the number of end users who were exposed to his civic voice expressions. To achieve this, he told me that he had concocted an array of visibility expansion projects. One was aimed at increasing his capacity to send invitations to Facebook "events" that he creates, aimed at generating actual street protests against "the left":

> [7.5] As Facebook limits the amount of invites you can send out, I create fake profiles. For each profile I had 300 friendship requests.[58] I would not stop until seeing at least 20,000 invites sent.

I was surprised by his naturalness when discussing these "fake profiles" and asked him to explain how he constructed them:

[58] At the time of writing this limit was 500 invitations per profile (Facebook, 2019).

[7.6] Like, I invent this 'Jair Souza' [the alias of the fake profile]. To avoid having the real 'Jair Souza' knowing about it, because it is obvious that this [real] person eventually will find his picture, you can go and search for someone who lives abroad. Someone who lives in Belgium, Switzerland, and I get the picture of whoever I found, someone who is not well known. Each profile demands a different email address, so I created an email to each one of them. It takes like one hour to make 5 profiles. [Then] I go to the pages of [Brazil's far-right guru] Olavo de Carvalho, and then it depends on which kind of public you want. If I want to crowd out the event, I go to Olavo de Carvalho's page and see a post that has the largest number of 'likes,', and I click in the reactions, and mostly in those little hearts, of 'love,' and I add [as a 'friend'] everyone that clicked on 'love' in that post, and I start doing it in other publications. Until I reach the maximum of 300 friendship requests. Then, what's my goal? One thousand invites, say? Alright, I have these five profiles tailored to Olavo de Carvalho['s public], to talk about the event. Logically it's a topic that they [other end users] are fond of, and they start to share [the event's page]. But Facebook is a smart tool. It blocks, it excludes [the fake profiles], it knows what you're doing. I think I've created a total of 40 [fake profiles], and like 5 of them are still working. It [Facebook] excludes, there's no way [to avoid]. Unless you interact, but, man, can you image the amount of work that would entail? it's impossible. You'd have to create an artificial life to 30 [fake] profiles, it's insane, no way. I keep creating, I know Facebook will exclude afterwards, but I keep creating them.

In this example, Fabricio's civic voice is exerted not through a text or a picture, but by creating a Facebook event. His project did not include changing the events – their themes, place, tone – but multiplying the profiles able to "voice" them. To circumvent the Facebook invites limit, he constructs what he calls "fake profiles", which involves using an array of functionalities, enabled or not by Facebook. First, he creates an "event" in the platform. He then searches the profiles of real end users (preferably from "abroad"), copying their pictures and providing Facebook with an email address that he has no intention of using, and uses these to create the fake profile. He concludes by "adding" strangers from conservative pages who seem to be as conservative as he is (a form of manual microtargeting) as "friends" and, finally, sends them the invites. While Facebook cannot stop him from creating fake profiles and sending out invites, Fabricio describes it as a "very smart tool" that will "delete" his forgeries over time. This seems to create a cat-and-mouse game: in response to the deletion of his fake profiles, Fabricio keeps "creating [new profiles]". His description differs from Olivia's and Artur's. First, this kind of visibility expansion project appears to depend on the assumption that Facebook is, potentially, exploitable, which is a core implicit understanding of the uncontrollable visibility imaginary. However, unlike Olivia and Artur (Sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.2 above), he portrays himself as the exploiter, not the victim. Second, his project engendered little ambivalence about his civic voice. When asked if he felt heard when talking about politics on the platform, Fabricio said that:

[7.7] When I talk about politics I am quite heard. And people usually defend me. I do not even need to... They listen to me – they listen to me a lot.

No other interviewee described creating false Facebook accounts – but others told me they may intentionally manufacture interactions, which encompasses a different sort of imaginary about the platform's algorithmic visibility regime.

7.2.4. 'Come on! Let's 'Like' It!': Visibility Expansion Through Tactical Self-Interactions

Octavio, the cultural producer, administered multiple Facebook pages where he published pro-LGBT texts and videos. These pages, he said, were crucial for his attempts to be seen by more people.

[7.8] There are some strategies. The amount of 'likes' you give to it. With three pages, in addition to my profile, you 'like' with each one of them and that [post] starts to appear more [to others]. And there's this other possibility: commenting. Posts that are more frequently 'commented' and 'liked' may appear more frequently. So, I go and comment with my own profile, then with one of my pages, then with another page, and another, and it will start to appear to my 'friends', so they can 'like' it as well. These strategies are not inevitable, infallible. They make it easier [to be seen] but have their limits.

A similar visibility expansion project was described by the accountant Vigo, who administers a politically conservative Facebook page with other friends. He described their actions as crucial to increase the "reach" of the content produced by the page.

[7.9] I always ask other administrators to engage [with the page's content] so that the page does not lose relevance. I say: 'Fuck, 1,500 people saw this and [only] 100 people 'liked' it? That's absurd'. I go there and say, 'Damn, we're losing reach, and that's because folks are not engaging'. I say, really, 'come on! let's 'like' it, let's do it!'.

Rather than changing how they talk about politics, Octavio's and Vigo's projects involved the production of datafied self-interactions. In Octavio's case, he produced the interactions himself; Vigo's project involved requests to other administrators to "like" these posts ("come on, let's 'like' it"). Underlying their projects seems to be the assumption that these comments and "likes" will be read by "the algorithm" (an expression both interviewees used in our conversations) as signals that posts on their pages are relevant and, thus, as Octavio said, will "appear more frequently" in others' news feeds. This assumption is consistent with the predictive visibility imaginary, according to which Facebook analyses interactional data to predict what end users wish to see. This sort of project was not "infallible", but could "make it easier" to be seen, Octavio said. If a post was seen by 1,500 people,

it appeared to Vigo to have the potential to be seen by even more people. Not fulfilling this potential, he said, would be "absurd". It seems that all efforts, even single "likes", count on Facebook. Furthermore, given that both Octavio and Vigo viewed themselves as minorities whose visibility needed to be increased in order to be heard (Octavio as a supporter of the LGBT cause, and Vigo as a conservative citizen), it is possible to associate their drive to be seen with their social context."

These interactions did not appear to be "fake" like Fabricio's profiles. After all, the "likes" and "comments" were produced by Octavio and Vigo, and there is no evidence to suggest that they were merely pretending to be interested in these posts. Instead, their projects appear to be tactical instantiations of their civic self-understandings.

7.2.5. 'The Best Time to Post': Visibility Expansion Through Temporal Control

For other participants, another visibility expansion project involved managing the timing of their civic voice expression. Consider four examples:

> [7.10] The time you post is important. I believe some things are boosted by these algorithms. So, for instance, when something happens, and I think I have to talk about it, I'll wait for these times of the day. My public, of my social network, is more [present] in the evening, 6pm to 5pm, that when [Facebook] is teeming. When people are leaving their jobs, they are in the bus or in the train, looking at their mobiles. If I post at 6pm, that will reverberate for some minutes, 40 or 50 minutes. And maybe if I post at 6pm, the person is leaving his job, so in 10 or 20 minutes he will be in the public transportation, idle and in the social media, so it's more likely he will see it. **[Benjamin, junior consultant]**

> [7.11] Sometimes I want an audience; I want to reach the greatest number of people at that moment. Then you say, what is the best time to post? Then, like, at least for me, in my network of 'friends', I've observed that it is from 6pm onwards, until 8pm, 9.30pm, there is a bigger public. **[Lorenzo, retail clerk]**

> [7.12] After Thursday, after the work shift, it starts to peak. Thursday, then Friday, Saturday, and Sunday – end of Sunday, after supper, then it peaks. **[Luis, pensioner]**

These projects did not seem to affect *what* the interviewees said about politics, but *when* they did so. They described different ideas about which moment is appropriate to post. For Benjamin, peak time began at 5pm or 6pm and might generate 40 to 50 minutes of increased visibility, when potential readers "are leaving their jobs, they are in the bus or in the train"; Lorenzo also thought peak time began at 6pm, but saw it lasting until 9.30pm. Meanwhile, days were more important for Luis, who viewed the weekend as a particularly good time. From their depictions, it is not clear why they have different assumptions about what is peak time on Facebook. There might be several influencing

factors, such as readers' presumed ages and occupations (see the allusions to work by Luis) and income (Benjamin's references to public transportation, which, in Brazil, is rarely used by high and upper middle classes). However, these assumed peak times stemmed from the previous interactions my interviewees were able to "observe", as Lorenzo put it. That is, participants seemed to view certain times as more likely to generate interactions, based on which timings had generated more (or less) interactions on previous posts – an orientation that is consistent with the predictive visibility imaginary.

So far, I have discussed visibility expansion projects that did not involve any change to civic voice expressions. However, no interviewee reported enacting only this first kind of project, as the second part of this chapter shows.

7.3. Visibility Expansion Through the Control of Civic Voice Elements

For all participants who described trying to expand the visibility of their civic voice, doing so *also* involved acting upon their civic voice expressions. My analysis revealed four kinds of this second sort of project. I call them: *tactical aggressions, simplification, visual provocations* and *news association*.

7.3.1. "It's a Form of Offending, Really': Visibility Expansion Through Tactical Aggressions

I return to Fabricio, the conservative telemarketer. In addition to creating fake profiles to expand his capacity to send invites to Facebook "events", his projects involved what he termed "zoeira":

> [7.13] [*Zoeira*] is when you offend leftists, but in a funny way. I create a lot of *zoeira* content. Recently I made a meme of some leftists who were protesting in a beach, together with the *Marcha das Vadias* [Brazilian version of the SlutWalk movement] people. And they painted something in their breasts, like circles and stuff, and had their trousers unbuttoned. Then, I got their image, put it in the upper side [of the meme] and in the lower side I put the image of [Jair] Bolsonaro surrounded by other guys with machine guns. This went viral. It's a form of offending, really. Conservative pages on Facebook, they grow with zoeira. I select the words very carefully; they have to be the words that [conservative] folks will want to hear. Instead of calling a feminist a 'feminist', I'll call her Chewbacca, because she doesn't shave her armpit. We have this work method.

The actions Fabricio narrated do not require the exploitation of any functionality of the platform, but rather the expression of his political views as *zoeira*, his "work method". This term could be understood in English as a derogatory joke. However, as Fabricio's excerpt indicates, in Brazilian

Internet slang, it is commonly used to designate ironic hate speech – which I define as a form of discourse which conveys hatred towards certain social groups and, in particular, minorities. He offered several examples of this kind of voice expression. The one described in the above excerpt is a meme in which conservative politicians seem to be about to or willing to machine-gun naked feminists. The other is a text comparing feminists to the Star Wars "Chewbacca", the bipedal hairy ape and dog mix, whose language is a form of howling. In his reported voice expression, there was no discussion of ideas, visions or actions, but rather eulogies to physical violence and de-humanization of rivals – but "in a funny way". Fabricio's reported belief that *this* kind of content might go "viral" seems to be rooted in the understanding that the platform grants more reach to content that receives more interactions, which might be explained by the predictive visibility imaginary. He seems to assume that the more "offensive" the message, the more interactions it generates, and the more visible the message becomes. However, on its own, this social imaginary of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime falls short of explaining why Fabricio seemed to think that offences – and not other expressions – could generate more interactions. Consider a second excerpt of our conversation:

> [7.14] You're like, 'I can say what I want', that's it. [Leftists] call me homophobic, fascist, racist, when I'm nothing like this, so I have to get it back to them somehow and the only way that I can do it is offending them. A video [celebrating] the [Brazilian] military dictatorship goes viral because there's this guy who can't say what he thinks in his classroom, because inside his college there's a lot of people who are against him. If conservative people try to speak out, they are… God knows what can happen. They might even get hurt, you know? So, the freedom of expression that is lacking in colleges, in the institutions, they find on Facebook. This [*zoeira*] ends up creating some... not fans, but people who admire you, who respect you, believe in what you say. Like, you don't have to present proofs, you simply say and people listen to you. I have influence over people, a lot of influence.[...] People won't believe me. Like, 'what do you work with?,' then I say, 'Oh, I live in a shantytown, I'm a telemarketer'. [People say]: 'But, man, you are leading the movement!' When I post something and realize it hasn't gone viral as in the way it should have gone, if it does not get at least 50 likes, I delete it. [In this case], I believe that what I have published, it might not be exactly what I think. The Brazilian Right is not so consolidated, you know? There's a series of questions, of values, norms, precepts, that I'm not so sure about yet. So, if it doesn't reach this amount of 'likes', this is not what should have been posted.

One might initially interpret this excerpt as laying bare the constitutive ties between Fabricio's offensive civic voice expressions and how he comprehends himself as a citizen. Doing so would suggest that Fabricio created and enacted this kind of project because it is largely consistent with how he understands himself and his peers – those who, according to the predictive visibility imaginary, were more likely to "like" and, thus, be exposed to his messages. According to his description, the real oppressors are minorities such as "feminists", and this sort of aggression, more than being a way of

making a message go "viral", is a genuine and justified expression of his civic self-understanding ("'I can say what I want'").

However, the second part of the excerpt suggests that his civic self-understanding is less clearly defined. The "respect" zoeira generates appears to help him comprehend what he wants to say in the first place – to identify which civic voice is his civic voice. If a post did not achieve a certain number of "likes" (a form of recognition marker for him, apparently), he deletes it. "It might not be exactly" what he thinks: he is still learning the "norms, precepts" that guide the "Brazilian Right", and this learning appears to mainly occur through communications that will be assessed as right or wrong according to the number of reactions it receives on Facebook. It is not that he necessarily wants to exert a hateful civic voice, but rather that attacking rivals seems necessary if he wants to be recognized through datafied interactions. This social stance seems important: as he states, "people will not believe" that a poor young Black living in a shantytown can lead "the movement". His history of voicelessness appears to render him particularly eager to be heard – at any cost.

Fabricio was the only interviewee who demonstrated no ethical doubt in relation to this kind of project. Compare his narrative with that of Helena, the law student:

> [7.15] Let me exemplify. Society is tired of feminists; they crossed all the lines. [Then] I made a video, and said, really angry: 'Let me tell you something, you motherfuckers, if all men are a rapist in potential, you're all whores in potential. Why? If everything is socially constructed, and you are in the *Marcha das Vadias* [SlutWalk], just accept the label!'. I don't think that all feminist as motherfuckers, but I say, 'you motherfuckers', it's just *zoeira*. I don't really think all feminists are potential whores, it's just a futility, who cares. In the end, to whose life does it make any difference to call feminists 'whores in potential'? But that's what goes viral. It's just a gratuitous aggression. Why? If there's an anti-left feeling, leftists are to blame. They put labels on people, and people find a way of reacting. [But] it's the kind of post that, if you look at my Facebook, I rarely do this kind of posting, it's the one I least enjoy posting. I make it when I need to get something to go viral, when there's something that is going on and people are not realizing, [when this 'thing'] starts to make me uncomfortable. [But] there is an enormous demand on you when you start to get visibility. And it comes in all aspects of his life. There's a lot of [people] in the Internet that thinks that to be conservative is to be fundamentalist, and I'm born and raised in a *samba* school. I do not want to have some imbeciles saying I'm not a conservative because I go and see my friends in the samba school. I do not want to be held accountable about my life. That's when I polarized [myself] even more. The more I get polarized, the more I find these folks so I can block them, you see?

Helena's description both resonates with and contradicts Fabricio's. Her project is a form of *zoeira* which, albeit not mentioning murder or de-humanization, is also constructed as a form of hate

speech against “feminists” (“you are all potential whores”). Likewise, her project seems to be linked to the predictive visibility imaginary, in as much as it relies on eliciting interactions from others that will make the video “go viral”. Yet she did not seem to be fully certain about the ethics of her actions and makes sure to distance herself from her own message. To say that “all feminists are whores” is just a “gratuitous aggression”, she said. Helena appears to know that her message is ethically contestable. In fact, as Helena told me after our interview, one of her good friends is a moderate feminist. She describes using hate to express herself as akin to a necessary evil, something to be done only when there is a pressing issue that “people are not realizing”.

In addition to the ethical frictions between her civic self-understanding and this project, there were concerns about the consequences of “visibility”. She appears to assume that being seen by more end users may cause her to lose control over who can see and, thus, interact with her – which is typical of the uncontrollable visibility imaginary. These criticisms, she said, come not from the “feminists” she attacks, but from her own ideological group, and seemed to be as much linked to her imaginary of Facebook’s algorithmic visibility regime as to conservatives’ prejudices about Helena’s gender. Her links to a samba school that parades at the Carnival street party seem to bother her conservative critics. In her words, they “demand” ideological coherence of her voice, as if she could not be both a conservative *and* attend a samba school. Helena disagrees and decides to protect herself – by attacking. Her description suggests that the more “polarized” she is, the more she is seen, and the easier it is to spot these critics and “block” them to prevent future criticisms. Her narrative is similar to those of Olivia and Artur examined in the first part of this chapter. In her attempt to be heard, she discovers she must cope with threats of (unfair) attacks – ironically, based on sexist views on what women can or cannot be. Yet, instead of retreating, as Olivia and Artur reported doing in a similar situation (Sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.2, respectively), she became even more aggressive.

The same sort of projects were described in less violent tones by progressive interviewees. One example is Manuela, a Black architect. During the political crisis, she had become a staunch critic of racism and sexism. When I asked what she did to be seen by more end users, she told me:

> [7.16] The posts that really go viral, they have to have a certain radicality, because people ‘like’ something that is more, like… [radical]. What they understand as aggressive I understand as a necessary radicalism. The radical thought is, like, we do not want to watch *Globeleza*, I don’t want to watch it. But, of course, in the real world *Globeleza* will not cease existing: it will only get a proper outfit. I understand that our proposal may be radical so as to achieve a minimal transformation.

Contrary to the suggestions of murderer, de-humanization and misogyny depicted so far in this section, Manuela's attempt to increase the visibility of her voice is not described as involving hate speech. However, it seems to encompass a transformation of her civic voice expression. Her example concerns a post about a famous Brazilian TV programme, which shows a naked Black woman (the so-called *mulata Globeleza*) dancing *samba* to announce the beginning of the Carnival season. In mixing Brazil's historic sexism and racism, Manuela states that the character (and its naturalization as a traditional TV programme) represents some of the worst problems of Brazilian society. In order to increase the possibility of having more people see her criticism of the programme, she not only criticized the TV programme, but also added "some radicality" to the post: Globeleza should be totally banned. The goal is to attract readers, elicit more reactions and, in consequence, increase the number of people who could see her posts ("people 'like' something that is more radical]"). Like the other examples in this section, it seems that the predictive visibility imaginary is implied in her project: it allows Manuela to think that boosting the number of people who could see her post involved receiving interactions, which in turn involved provoking her readers with some "radicality".

While aware of the ethical issues that her visibility expansion project may raise ("other people say that it is aggressive"), Manuela did not try to distance herself from it. She justified her "radical" position as "necessary" in view of Brazil's equally radical racist and sexist social order – of which she sees herself a victim, as she repeatedly told me. Instead of *artificially* adjusting her voice expression to meet Facebook's assumed visibility requirements (as Helena apparently did), Manuela seemed to allow herself to express her already existing "radicality".

The examples presented by Helena and Manuela seem to illustrate how end users' critical self-reflexivity may shape in different ways, but do not stop offensive civic voice expressions. Joaquim, the script writer, presented a different perspective:

> [7.17] I quit using these tools. It's not always that a post goes viral now. But I do not have this intention anymore. I observed that visibility opens some doors. Before, I had to beg for people to pay attention to my [film] scripts. Today, the crowdfunding websites are the ones who approach me, asking 'hey, let's launch a campaign…'. I started to see some things that were a bit worrying. This consumption [of information], I don't know, maybe it is harmful. Not to me, but to the [political] discussion, broadly. When you write a text, and in this text I'm hitting politicians, bum! It's like 20 or 30 thousands 'likes'. Then, you write a text about, like, my affective relationship with my dog, and it's fewer than that. Then you write again about politicians, and [the 'likes'] come back. Then you start to think, 'I have to start talking about politicians so people will see me'. And you understand that, every time you trash a politician, you have more visualizations, there's more repercussion. And then you start hitting first and

> asking and thinking later. I started to ask myself: how does this influence people's minds? This distrust in politics, generally? What are we really problematizing? I have eight thousands followers [in his page]. It's OK. But there are people who have 50, 60 thousands. Getting at these numbers would demand much more marketing, it's not so… true. It's not really honest. I think I'm at a point that, you know? Is it ethical? What are the limits? I've opted for a more moderate discourse. You ask yourself: I'm going to go viral, but go viral for what? What is the point? I'm not sure if I want to be in this second phase, in which you become a professional 'influencer'. I'm not interested, I see no point in doing it.

Joaquim is a Black young man who grew up in a poor family. He had a rather ordinary political presence on Facebook until some months before our conversation. When one of his posts on politics unexpectedly went viral and achieved more than a million users (in his estimation), he decided to seize what he saw as a professional opportunity. He created a page and invested considerable effort in attracting readers. One of the techniques he utilized to generate more interactions (or "repercussions", in his words) and "be more visible" was a form of offensive voice expression: "trash politicians", or "hitting first and asking and thinking later". That is, personal attacks that were intended to attack individuals, not discuss ideas. As in the other cases examined in this section, his visibility expansion project sought interactions from his algorithmic "bubble" – typical of the predictive visibility imaginary.

Similar to Helena and Manuela, Joaquim's conscious usage of aggression to increase the number of users who would see his Facebook posts led to him to question: "is this ethical?". However, unlike these other participants, this questioning eventually caused Joaquim to "quit using these tools". What appears to have happened is some reconsideration of how he understands himself as a citizen, a process triggered by the enactment of his project. Initially, Joaquim apparently thought his civic voice amenable to instrumentalization – something that could be shaped to achieve maximum visibility and increase the odds of being listened to at no substantive cost. Over time, he began to feel recognized. He received invites to write film scripts and, at the time of the interview, was about to have a book of essays published. This prompted him to reconsider the costs of what he termed "marketing". In part, this subjective process was framed, he suggested, by his view of the Brazil's political crisis. Joaquim seemingly saw himself as contributing to the "distrust in politics". Moreover, by contemplating the possibility of becoming an "influencer", he apparently realized that this is not how he wanted to be recognized as a citizen, that those aggressive posts were not his "true" self-representation. As he said: "I'm going to go viral, but go viral for what?". What initially appeared to be an acceptable pathway to being heard in a society that rarely sees and hears people like him,

eventually proved to contradict his civic self-understanding. He then opted for a "moderate discourse".

Interviewees also reported less contentious projects, as discussed in the succeeding sections.

7.3.2. 'I Seek to Use a Simple Language': Visibility Expansion Through Simplification

Among my interviewees, the businessman Daniel was the most popular – at least according to Facebook metrics. His political posts often received over a thousand "likes", and hundreds of "shares" and comments. However, he was not an "influencer". Daniel told me that he made no money out of his Facebook presence – and he did not seem to need to do so. From his spacious office in one of the most expensive areas of São Paulo, where we met, he commanded a multi-million dollar company.

When I asked how he enhances the visibility of a post, he said:

> [7.18] If you think of my timeline [his 'friends'], considering this algorithm, it's made of people who are really irate with what is going on. So, any post that you make that reinforces this idea [ire] gets a lot of visibility. So, like, things are very predictable in a universe that I know that the public will identify with what I write. Do you wanna see?

He got up from his armchair, turned on his computer, accessed a news media website and clicked on a link about bankers' profits in Brazil. "I'll make a post about this piece, let's see what happens". After logging into his Facebook account, he typed a text which, according to his description, was intended to "criticize bankers, criticize profits". At the end of the interview, the post "should get 1,500 'likes'", he said, as the red notifications started to pop up on the screen almost immediately after he clicked on the "post" button. (The text had received 800 "likes" when I left his office and had over 2,000 reactions some hours later.) When we resumed our conversation, he said:

> [7.19] It's a simple recipe, 'criticize banks, criticize bankers'. The grey zone – this is where it gets hard to know what will happen. The hard is not this black and white, the hard thing is this middle ground in which you talk about something slightly more elaborated. Then it is hard to know what the reaction will be. When no post goes viral for more than two days in a row, then I post something criticizing banks and then I'm back in the radar, you understand? […] [But] if you're in a debate with someone who is politicized, who has a strongly held position, [he] won't change.

The post I witnessed Daniel writing did not convey offence. It was an outcry against bankers' immense wealth at a moment when Brazil was engulfed in the deepest recession in its history. According to Daniel, the text would have hundreds of visualizations because its "black and white"

message would reinforce the existing beliefs of those who see his posts – at least when he considers the "bubble" created by "the algorithm", as he told me at another moment of the interview. Again, behind this project is the assumption, linked to the predictive visibility imaginary, that Facebook's visibility regime privileges interactions. First, it orients his understanding of who will see his posts (the post-crisis "irate", "politicized people" who rarely change their opinion) and, second, it generates an understanding that "black and white" posts will commonly have more "reactions", and thus visibility. The detachment with which he describes the post ("it's a simple recipe, 'criticize bankers'", something that he does when he wants to come back "to the radar"), suggests that such voice expression might not necessarily represent his civic self-understanding. Nevertheless, at no point did he demonstrate any discomfort with this post, nor did he report having changed or halted this kind of visibility expansion project because of ethical concerns. For him, it seemed, having his civic voice heard is not directed to changing the minds of people who, in the end, "won't change" anyway. Rather, he appeared to be satisfied just with receiving approval, in the form of "likes", "shares" and comments – or at least accepted that this was what talking about politics on Facebook could offer him.

Daniel's project of visibility expansion appeared to involve simplifying his civic voice expressions. That is, making his posts easier to consume, understand and accept by other end users. However, his seeming utilization of simplified voice expressions to experience the satisfaction associated to reactions did not echo what other participants told me. Consider what Luis, the pensioner, said about his ploys to make his videos seen by more people:

> [7.20] I try to convey [a message] in a way that it does not look like I'm pressuring. We were talking of radicalism, but without looking like it's radical. I seek to use a simple language. It makes no sense to put in an intellectualized language, because people get lost in the middle. One example: corporativism in the private sector. This is how I put it: corporativism started this way, one had to be part of a guild, then it evolved, and we have arrived at labour unions, which jam the economic activity in Brazil. Why is there a compulsory union tax? That is jamming [the economy].

Both Daniel and Luis assume that "simple" messages could increase the visibility of their civic voice by generating more reactions. However, they seemed to disagree about whether those who would see these messages were willing to change and, consequently, about what it meant to be heard by these others. Luis was not (just) seeking approval. Rather, he appears to imagine that being heard translates into convincing people of his conservative beliefs – not through some form of open discussion, but through "subtle" messages, which allow him to communicate his "radical" conservative ideas without sounding too radical. The way his video unproblematically links mediaeval guilds and contemporary unions, or the idea that unions necessarily "jam" the economy, highlights

some of the simplifications that he considered were needed for other end users not to "get lost" during his videos. Again, while this simplified message did not seem to completely correspond to Luis's civic self-understanding, there was no sign of unease about such simplification. It seems to be a small concession to the possibility of convincing others of his point of view.

"Being heard" through simplified expressions of civic voice might have yet other meanings, as exemplified by Benjamin, the junior consultant.

> [7.21] I'm really into *textão* [in Brazilian Internet slang, long, serious posts on datafied platforms]. I have written [long] posts saying all that I thought, and I wanted people to go there and comment, to argue, to think. But they wouldn't. People are not fond of reading. You make two texts [on the same topic]. One is short, you can read without clicking on the 'See More' button. The other is more profound. The shortest one will get many more reactions, because people sometimes they just want to read [it quickly], to see your opinion. [...] Sometimes I share something, and if two people 'like' it, that's fine. Usually, [my posts] appear to people who think like me. I feel it's like a bubble. But there are some things that I want people to talk about, to discuss. Like when the police go to my neighbourhood and kill some kid. Then the police say, 'he was a thug', and then I see folks saying, 'yeah, but he was a thug'. [In these situations] I get really pissed, and then I try to have a more strategic vision, to reach more people. I try my best. Sometimes I don't manage to do it, but I try my best to be concise.

A young Black man living in an impoverished area of São Paulo, what Benjamin seems to want from trying to increase the visibility of his civic voice is not necessarily approval (like Daniel) or to convince people of his ideas (like Luis), but rather to inspire debate about police violence ("I want people to… discuss"). To generate any discussion, though, his text has first to be read. This might not necessarily mean posting "black and white" messages (as Daniel describes) or persuasive half-lies (as Luis suggests), but instead texts that are as short as possible ("I try my best to be concise"). It seems that this different understanding of what it means to be heard springs, at least partially, from Benjamin's different assumptions about who can see his posts. "Usually", he said, his posts appear to "people who think like him", that is, those who are already critical of the police. However, when something revolting occurs (such as the criminal murder of a young man by police officers), he wants to make this message extend beyond his "bubble". The background to these understandings and, thus, his actions, is arguably (yet again) the predictive visibility imaginary. Interestingly, conciseness is something that he "sometimes [doesn't] manage" to achieve, since he is "really into *textão*". This difficulty in doing what he imagines should be done to increase the number of users who would see his posts, indicates the existence of a certain friction between his civic self-understanding (which would like to post longer posts, "saying all" he wants to say) and the voice he knows will attract greater

visibility ("concise"). During the interview, however, Benjamin demonstrated little preoccupation with this adjustment. As with Luis, simplification appeared to be a small compromise.

This also seems to apply to the use of images, as I show next.

7.3.3. 'I Know What People Like to See': Visibility Expansion Through Visual Provocations

In the descriptions analysed above, there were allusions to the deployment of images to enhance the reach of civic voice expressions on Facebook – for example, Fabricio talking about memes in Section 7.3.1. Some interviewees explicitly stated and justified this usage. For instance, Miguel, a public policy student, told me that:

> [7.22] I usually post it with an image.
>
> [JCM] Does it need to be a flashy image?
>
> I believe that only an image already generates more views. The person is scrolling down [her news feed] in his mobile and he will stop to see the image, and then he starts to read [the post], you know?

Davi, the English teacher, described a similar project:

> [7.23] I have some training [in how to attract people's attention], I did a course on neuro-linguistic. If you post something with lots of text, this will not invite people to read. Sometimes, a simple sentence and a picture, like: 'Enough!', works best. Take gender ideology, if I want to post a criticism to gender ideology. You have to post something that will stir people up, sensitize people. Not manipulate them but make them think. I don't say: 'I think this, I think that'. I say: 'This is this! What you think?'. For instance, I saw that kids these days will undergo gender change surgery at 1-year-old. How am I going to protest this? Instead of fighting, I'll post a boy wearing girl's clothes sitting in the lap of a transvestite. And I said: is that what you want for your child? Done, that's my protest.

To make others "stop" at their posts, as Miguel put it, and "invite" them to read what they have to say, as Davi said, plain text is not enough. It should be accompanied by some form of visual attraction to make the message stand out among the continuous flow of their news feeds. These images seem to work like provocations: other end users will stop because of the picture and end up being exposed to ideas – even, presumably, if they were not initially interested in them. Both descriptions seem to depend on the assumption that human beings, or as Davi describes it, our brains, are naturally predisposed to look at pictures – even if they are not flashy, according to Miguel. The visual element might generate more reactions, which, likely, will increase the chances of others seeing the same post – which, in turn, is consistent with the predictive visibility imaginary.

In Miguel's case, using pictures did not appear to affect how he understands himself as a citizen; however, Davi is different. Enacting this project generated a consideration about his voice: was he manipulating others? The question makes sense since the example he gave could be understood as an attempt to induce people to refute LGBT rights ("gender ideology") by the association with paedophile-like figures who intend to force toddlers to "undergo" sex reassignment surgery ("I'll post a boy wearing girl's clothes sitting in the lap of a transvestite"). However, for Davi, this prejudiced caricature is just a way to make users "think". He realizes – but then apparently rejects – ethical issues.

A comparable example, but from someone at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum, was described by the Black dancer Lorena. We were discussing what she does to be seen by others when she said:

> [7.24] My work in the network is like a ladder, a slow process. I know what people like to see: people like seeing butts, they like seeing people dancing, I know exactly what folks like seeing on the Internet. I post what people like seeing on the Internet, and then, immediately after, I post a *textão*. It's a strategy.

She also appears to describe a form of visual provocation. Lorena first grabs her readers' attention with images of her body to provoke their interaction. The more others react to her images, the more likely they will see her future posts – consistent with the predictive visibility imaginary. Then, benefiting from the expected algorithmic closeness generated by these interactions, she posts explicitly political voice expressions ("*textão*"). Her visibility expansion project resembles a "ladder", in which attention is conquered step by step, as Lorena said.

Some might interpret this as a self-demeaning project, involving a Black woman living in a racist and sexist society who sees herself forced to expose her body in order to be heard as a citizen. This interpretation is valid, but does not correspond to Lorena's description:

> [7.25] When you represent yourself aesthetically, I think this is a political act. Because you're influencing people who are watching this video to think that this is positive, beautiful. And this is precisely our intention, because the TV won't do it. TV ridicules the fat woman, ridicules the Black gay guy. So, the idea is precisely to turn it upside down. We use videos to express the freedom of our bodies through dancing in a rather explicit way. And this has a political response because it's a strong confrontation, people feel uneasy.

For Lorena, showing off her non-White body, the kind of body which she said commonly is ridiculed in mainstream Brazilian media, is a way of challenging Brazil's racism and sexism. She said that giving her funk dancing job exposure on Facebook is explicitly and intentionally constructed as a "political answer". In essence, she assumes that the picture of her body is an expression of her civic voice. The actions she describes, as those of Miguel and Davi in this section, did not seem to contradict her civic self-understanding. However, as Section 9.4 suggests, this sort of visibility expansion projects might be interpreted as having implications for the recognition of *other* end users.

In addition to presenting images, news was also described as capable of expanding the visibility of interviewees' civic voice expressions on Facebook.

7.3.4. 'I Can Make it Explode': Visibility Expansion Through News Association

When the video-maker Amanda began expressing herself politically on Facebook, most of her material was about the difficulties of cycling in São Paulo. As a cyclist herself, this choice reflected her preoccupations and interests. However, at the time of our interview, what had been only a hobby had since become a potential way to make money – or at least strengthen her portfolio. That was when she started to consider what she could do to have her political posts seen by more end users:

> [7.26] I record lots of things that I shelve. I say: 'This is interesting, but I can tie this with something else to make it *really* interesting'. So, you don't want to waste an interview that is great, but about a topic that is not hot at the moment. It can wait and eventually I can tie it with something that will make it explode. So, my work usually comes down to this. And I think that thanks to these subjects I ended up migrating [as a video-maker] to the [topic of the] city, not only cycling, but the city's social and cultural movements.

Amanda's visibility expansion project does not entail tweaking her voice to make it more aggressive, simple or visually provocative, but instead associating it to a "hot" topic. This might involve her shelving and re-editing a "great" interview in order to "tie it" to something else that might become important, thus making it "really interesting" and eventually seeing it "explode" in terms of views. This project seems to assume that Facebook's visibility regime is oriented by interactions – which is consistent with the predictive visibility imaginary. I suggest there is an intuitive understanding of "agenda-setting" (see Feezel, 2018, for a recent discussion) underlying her description, for she appears to understand that a few topics dominate debate on platforms, while most others are marginalized. This was echoed by another interviewee, the copywriter Humberto, who used the term "social media

waves" to describe those events that draw public attention to a few discussions and influence how end users express themselves on platforms such as Facebook.

In the case of Amanda, her depiction suggests that enacting this project neither contradicted nor matched her civic self-understanding. Instead, it seems to have led her to construct a different comprehension of which voice she should articulate as a citizen. In her example, she started to post videos about the city of São Paulo and its "social and cultural movements", rather than of cycling, in an effort to explore other topics that could help her posts to become more visible.

7.4. Rejecting Visibility Expansion Projects

So far, I have examined the descriptions of participants who reported acting intentionally to expand the visibility of their civic voice expressions on Facebook. In this last part of the chapter, I analyse the reasons offered by interviewees to *not* enact this sort of visibility control project. My interpretation of their descriptions coalesced around three main justifications: the understanding that trying to be seen by more end users might be *useless, unethical* or *dangerous*.

7.4.1. 'I Don't Feel I Can Reach People': Visibility Expansion as a Useless Project

Consider two excerpts: the first is from my interview with Pedro, who works in a publishing company:

> [7.27] It [his posts] stays in a niche of thoughts that are very similar to mine. It doesn't really trespass [the limits of his 'niche']. I seek to understand the facts, to find a solution, to find a way to change [others], to participate. Only, I don't know, I do not feel that I can reach the people who should reflect [about their own views]. I have no idea how to do it. I resent not being able to reach these folks. I'm kind of giving up.

The second excerpt is from my conversation with Cristian, the geography student.

> [7.28] But I have a question, João, um ... the discussion I'm making, who should be exposed to it? [The goal] would be to reach the one who already knows or to reach that other? The quality of the reach you can't measure. I see the charts and I see the abstraction of the numbers, but, like, did it [his page's post] arrive at who they had to [see his message]? To the teachers who have never attended a university course? So, these numbers, for me, are, like, cool – but what about the quality? That's why I send emails and if I do not send [physical] letters is because of the price.

I suggest that both descriptions convey a similar sense of disappointment. An important theme in my conversation with Pedro was his idea that Facebook's "algorithms" create "bubbles" – described by him as "niches". His posts, he said, were usually seen by end users whose "thoughts" were similar to his – a notion that chimes with the predictive visibility imaginary. For him, the "bubble"

seems to be not merely an idea on how the platform governs who can see whom, but is also an assumption, which informs his decision on what not to do. Cristian's description refers to a Facebook page he administers, aimed at communicating academic information about geography – his undergraduate degree discipline. While he did not use the term "bubble", his rhetorical question ("[The goal] would be to reach… that other?") suggests a similar assumption: he cannot "reach" the "others" who were outside his online circle of interaction. However, in his example, the "other" is not the person who disagreed with him ideologically, as in Pedro's case, but rather people who were *socially* distant from him – the school teachers who did not study at a university, but who could benefit from the posts on his Facebook page.

The disappointment demonstrated by Pedro and Cristian appears to stem from the assumption that trying to expand their visibility on Facebook would not guarantee that their civic voices would be heard by those who would indeed benefit from hearing them. As Cristian said, he could see the "number" of views in the engagement analytics provided by his page, but these numbers did not tell him much about the individuals who saw the posts – were they the "right" ones? He said that the "abstraction" of the figures lacks "quality". The apparent uselessness of trying to control their visibility in a way that is conducive to their civic recognition prompts somewhat different responses. At the time of our conversation, Pedro was less excited by the idea of exerting his civic voice on Facebook – and, thus, was less active ("I'm kind of giving up"). Cristian, on the other hand, appeared to be more interested in communicating with people through other means. He told me that emails and physical letters were better options to allow him to spread his ideas.

In the next section, I analyse descriptions that involve another reason not to increase the visibility of civic voice.

7.4.2. 'I'm not Going to Play Social Games': Visibility Expansion as an Unethical Project

When I asked Theo, the lawyer, if he tried to increase the number of people who see his Facebook posts, he replied: "Um, wrong person to ask that" and then elaborated:

> [7.29] I never wanted to post anything that is radical just to generate discussion. What I have to 'share' I will 'share'. My Facebook is what I think. I'm not going to defend someone who I think should not be defended, I'm not going to play these social games in social media, post something to please someone.

Later in the interview, when I asked if he thought his voice was heard, he said:

> [7.30] No, when its Theo's voice, never. If you look at my Facebook… [Gets his phone, opens the Facebook app, scroll down his posts]. Of my last seven posts, the last one had two 'likes'. The rest, no 'like' at all. But to be heard I would have to rebut the comments, sometimes nasty comments. Not sure if this is what makes me happy.

Theo's narrative is typical of what other interviewees told me: trying to expand the reach of civic voice expressions may entail certain ethical dispositions which these interviewees did not appear to possess – and did not *want* to possess, it seems. The real-estate agent, Antonio, told me that trying to be seen by more users is something for "professionals'", not "ordinary people", and suggested that any such effort would be dishonest. Emilia, another real-estate agent, said that talking about politics on Facebook is not about the "maths" (numbers of "likes", "shares" etc) and compared this sort of project with commercial (not political) activity. In all cases, the assumption is that increasing one's visibility depends on generating interactions – which can again be explained by the predictive visibility imaginary.

What often seems to be behind these justifications is an ethical trade off, similar to those elicited by the projects I named tactical aggressions (Section 7.3.1): should ordinary end users like my interviewees sacrifice their civic self-understanding in order to be seen by more people on Facebook? For some participants, the ethical questions emerged after they had enacted their project; for others, including Theo, the very possibility of having to compromise their civic voices seemed to fully contradict how they appeared to see themselves as citizens. I suggest that this is not just an issue of authenticity versus artificiality – although this seems to underlie Antonio's reference to ordinariness. Essentially, it is about what they saw as the right way of doing democratic politics, a politics that ought not involve becoming "radical" simply to provoke "discussion", as Theo put it. Their choice does not seem to be associated with the social consequences of visibility expansion projects, but with a rejection of the sort of civic recognition that accompanies these projects – a recognition that they appeared to see as, *itself,* unsatisfactory. In Theo's example, his posts could indeed receive more "likes" – but this would also require him to "rebut… nasty" comments, which simply did not make him "happy" as a citizen. The next section discusses concerns about a distinct negative consequence of visibility expansion projects.

7.4.3. 'A Guard Flashed Me a Gun': Visibility Expansion as a Dangerous Project

The following excerpt of my interview with Vicente, the theatre teacher, is a good illustration of the third main reason interviewees offered for not trying to expand the "reach" of their civic voice on Facebook:

[7.31] I never thought of a strategy to reach [more people]. Who read, read, who didn't read, too bad. At the time of the protests against the bus fares [June 2013], I was quite in the front line, I had a lot of reach [on Facebook]. We had some demonstrations where I grabbed the mic and criticized a big shot [of the transportation section in his city]. That day, a security guard flashed me a gun. One day, I went to the [bus] station and the same guard was there. He looked at me as if saying, 'I remember you'.

Similar to other excerpts examined in this chapter, Vicente's resembles a trajectory. At the beginning of the Brazilian crisis, when there were numerous protests against the rising bus fares in São Paulo and nearby cities, he was "in the front line", both on Facebook, as he told me, and in the streets. During one of the protests, Vicente decided to assume, although briefly, a leadership position: he "grabbed the mic" and attacked a powerful businessman. This attracted a subtle but unmistakeable death threat from a security guard who, he was to learn later, had not forgotten him. The way he presented his story implies that becoming more visible on Facebook might be comparable to leading a street protest. In a country such as Brazil, and for someone who defends the same progressive causes Vicente defends, both forms of leadership can lead to physical violence. Similar to Olivia and Artur, Vicente appeared to believe that the possibility of being unable to control who can see him on Facebook overshadows the attempt to become more visible – which is consistent with the uncontrollable visibility imaginary.

While the previous section describes an ethical trade off, the stakes were higher in Vicente's story. He appears to be more concerned with his physical integrity, rather than with having his civic self-understanding recognized or not by others. In his depiction, being heard – on Facebook or in the streets – potentially appears to be associated to the risk of being murdered. Interestingly, this apparent belief seems to have resulted from a brief moment when he was "heard". But he was not willing to gamble with his life for politics. Later in our conversation, he said that one of the reasons he decided to "stop a bit" doing politics on Facebook was the realization of how real this threat was. The fear articulated by Vicente might sound extreme; Chapter 8 suggests it emerged in several interviews.

7.5. Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings related to SRQ 3.1, which asked whether end users attempted to expand their visibility on Facebook, and the nature of the eventual relationship between these attempts and the expression of their civic voice on the platform. The analysis of interviewees' descriptions suggests that various kinds of visibility control projects might be conceived and enacted to achieve this goal. The first part of the chapter showed that these projects can involve *piggybacking* (Section 7.2.1) on others' visibility*;* using "friendship" requests to increase the number of people who

can see posts (*network expansion*, Section 7.2.2)*;* engendering *voice multiplication* (Section 7.2.3) through the use of fake profiles*;* using *tactical self-interactions* (Section 7.2.4) via interface buttons; and posting at certain times, which I call *temporal control* (Section 7.2.5). While none of these projects included altering what the individual wanted to say, it does not follow that they do not act on the expression of their civic voice. The second part of the chapter discussed how interviewees reported transforming how they express themselves politically on Facebook in the expectation of increased visibility. My fieldwork identified at least four kinds of projects: engagement in *tactical aggressions* (Section 7.3.1) towards others*,* which usually includes hate speech; a more concise and easier-to-understand voice (*simplification,* Section 7.3.2*);* the inclusion of *visual provocations* (Section 7.3.3) such as pictures, as part of their civic voice expression; and altering their self-representation to allow links to more newsworthy events, which I call *news association* (Section 7.3.4). In the final part of the chapter, I discussed the reasons interviewees gave for *not* increasing their visibility, that is, their assumptions that these projects were *useless*, *unethical* or *dangerous* (Sections 7.4.1, 7.4.2 and 7.4.3, respectively).

In Chapter 8, I consider a different sort of project, which is aimed at reducing the visibility of civic voice expressions.

Chapter 8

Visibility Reduction Projects

8.1. Introduction

In examining interviewees' descriptions of how they attempted (or not) to expand the visibility of their civic voice expressions on Facebook, Chapter 7 moved the thesis to the empirical investigation of the civic consequences of Facebook's datafication power.

This chapter continues to explore these ramifications. It does so through an analysis of what Section 3.6.3 defined as *visibility reduction projects*, that is, the actions devised by participants to hide their civic self-representations on the platform. Therefore, this chapter tackles **SRQ 3.2: Do ordinary end users' attempt to reduce the visibility of their civic voice expressions on Facebook? If so, is this attempt associated with how they articulate these expressions?**

Given their theoretical and empirical parallels, the approaches and organization adopted in Chapter 7 and in this one are similar (see Section 7.1). Data analysis involved interrogating each reported action to reduce the visibility of one's civic voice expressions to unpack the relative roles of the social imaginaries of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime (see Chapter 6) and individuals' civic self-understandings. Whereas interviewees' accounts about their projects varied substantially, they mirror the categories identified in Chapter 7. The first part of this chapter considers those few projects that did not include controlling civic voice expressions themselves. The second part explores the large number of reported projects in which participants' intervened in their civic expressions. Lastly, the third part examines why some interviewees seemed to be unwilling to try to reduce the visibility of their civic voices.

8.2. Visibility Reduction by Controlling Non-Civic Voice Elements

Some participants told me they reduced their visibility on Facebook by acting upon elements other than their civic voice expression. My analysis of their descriptions identified three examples of this sort of visibility reduction project, which I characterize as: *(re)categorization of others*, *space shifting* and *tactical delays*.

8.2.1. 'Sometimes I Use the 'Except'': Visibility Reduction Through (Re)categorization of Others

Benjamin, the junior consultant, told me that a common issue related to his political usage of Facebook was understanding which of his Facebook "friends" would be able to see his posts. He said:

[8.1] On Facebook, you have many publics. College teacher, a girl you're hanging out with, your boss, you mom, grandma. If you're unemployed, for instance, you have to show yourself as intelligent to those people who can help you to find a job. But to your neighbour you can't show yourself as very intelligent, because the kid never went to school, he will see this [post] and say, 'oh, what a jerk', he will see you on the street and say, 'you've been kind of an idiot, saying stuff no-one understands – your think you're an intellectual?'. So, with whom do you wanna talk to? So, sometimes I use the 'Except', you know?

Benjamin's project was a frequent one: he uses the platform's "Privacy Settings" functionality to prevent some of the people in his network from seeing some of his messages. This appears to be a straightforward example of the controllable visibility imaginary within Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime, where the platform gives end users unilateral capacity to make visual boundaries and decide who can see their civic voice expressions. However, this visibility reduction project, and the imaginary that enables it, also appear to be a response to Benjamin's assumption that, "on Facebook, you have many publics". While this might suggest an inability to define who is going to see what he posts, I would suggest that it is not related to the uncontrollable visibility imaginary. Rather, this description seems to allude to the notion of a "bubble", which is linked to both the controllable and predictive visibility imaginaries, as seen in Sections 6.2.2 and 6.3.2.

Benjamin seems to assume that his "bubble" is ideologically, but not *socially* homogenous. That is, he conceives it as composed of people from discrepant dimensions of his social life. This might include someone who could offer him a job, to whom it is important to "show yourself as intelligent", while also including a friend from his impoverished neighbourhood, who may ridicule the "intellectual" tone of his posts. Such a socially diverse "bubble" is linked to Benjamin's own shifting social context, I suggest. Although he is Black and was raised by a blue-collar worker family, Benjamin now had a college degree, a white-collar job and worked in the rich central area of São Paulo. At the same time – like many other 23-year-olds – he still lived with his parents in his old neighbourhood. This transitional moment seems to give rise to ambivalences about his civic self-understanding. He might want to be heard by some as an "intellectual", but not everyone will recognize this civic voice. Therefore, his project could be understood as an attempt to recategorize some end users as relating to his "old" self, and others to his "new" self. In doing so, he maintains the possibility of being recognized by some (e.g. someone who might help him find a job) and avoid misrecognitions by others (e.g. old friends) – an attempt to retain the multiplicity of his voice: to be both an intellectual and a neighbour.

Benjamin's account is representative of what many participants told me about how they utilize Facebook's "Privacy Settings" to reduce their visibility. However, there were other aspects of the interface that participants resorted to in their attempts to limit who could see their civic voice expressions, as can be seen in the next section.

8.2.2. 'I Always Send It via 'Inbox'': Visibility Reduction Through Space Shifting

Antonio, the conservative real estate agent, described having a very active political life on Facebook. However, he told me that he restricts these activities to what he understands were spaces of controllable visibility:

> [8.2] Usually, [he talks about politics] within the groups. In the open, it's for work. I do real estate, so [Facebook 'friends'] have access to my phone number and then I don't want to mix things. [Since] they are mostly clients. Even doing this, some of them [group users] still find me, get in [his profile]. At my workplace, I don't log in [his Facebook account]. Things are separate. [And] the left is radical. They shout, curse, are unable to debate, call you a 'racist', 'homophobic'.

The nurse, Rosa, told a somewhat similar story, but in relation to a different functionality.

> [8.3] If it's something very personal or will generate a controversy I'm not willing to deal with, I generally send it in the inbox. For instance, I wanted to show him [her boyfriend] that I'd found out that if Dilma were impeached, she could appeal to the Superior Court of Justice [one of Brazil's superior courts], and I always send it via [Inbox] message.

Antonio's and Rosa's projects involve moving across different spaces within Facebook's interface, with the expectation that they will be seen by specific others within these spaces. When Antonio talks about politics, he talks within specific Facebook groups, not "in the open" space of his profile. Even if groups do not render his civic voice expressions as completely hidden ("some of them [group users] still find me"), they provide the boundaries he needs to separate his civic voice from his professional life. In these spaces, he assumes that no one knows or cares about his life as a real estate agent. Rosa also chooses a different space – Facebook Messenger – which she assumes is strictly confidential. In this other space, she appears to imagine that only she and her boyfriend can see what she says. She moves into it whenever a topic might "generate a controversy", implying that that people other than her boyfriend may contest her civic voice expression. These projects and their implementations depend on the controllable and uncontrollable visibility imaginaries. It appears that the latter leads them to assume that there is the constant risk of losing the ability to decide who can view what they say about politics "in the open" spaces of the platform. Meanwhile, the controllable

visibility imaginary provides them with the means to at least try to retake command over how they are seen by others.

Antonio's and Rosa's descriptions suggest attempts to preserve their ability to continue to speak as themselves – and to be heard as themselves, even if only by certain individuals. In Antonio's case, it is possible to discern a different, non-algorithmic context shaping his civic self-understanding – ideology. Similar to many other conservative individuals I spoke to, he seemed to feel part of a frail minority. If he spoke in the "open", a person from the "radical left" could label him a "fascist" and potentially damage what he conceived of as a non-political element of his life (his career).

Other participants described projects that involved not space, but time, as I show next.

8.2.3. 'I Waited Three Months to Publish It': Visibility Reduction Through Tactical Delays

Section 7.2.5 discussed how Facebook users attempt to increase the visibility of their civic voice expressions by posting at moments when they assumed more people would see their posts. One of these was Benjamin, the junior consultant discussed in Section 8.2.1. Unsurprisingly, he told me that the same strategy might work in reverse. His example concerned a post about a distressing personal experience:

> [8.4] I was stopped by two policemen, close to here [the *Paulista* Avenue, in central São Paulo]. They were like, 'where is the drug?', 'where are you from?'. In an area that is mostly White, that people's social class is not mine, it clearly was: 'This is not your place'. Then I talked to people, [who told him], 'write something about it, it's unacceptable!'. I wrote it. [But] I waited three months to publish it. Because I was afraid it could generate a huge repercussion, that the police could get word, that something could happen.
>
> [JCM] What were you afraid of?
>
> Being murdered, really. I can die, 'just another junkie'. [Mimics policemen's voice]: 'Black, with this hair, of course you're [a criminal]'. So, when it's about the police, I'm very, very afraid, because I know that if something happens, it will be just another number. It won't change society. I have the profile of those who are murdered [Black, young, male]. I see myself in them. The police might kill me and make me into a 'drug user', you know? Who will have more voice – my mom, who says her son is innocent, or the police?

Benjamin wrote a text that, while apparently saying what he wanted it to say, was tactically delayed with the explicit goal of *not* generating a "huge repercussion". If the police officers who had harassed him read his post, he might "be murdered", he said. To be able to exert his civic voice, he

altered not the content of his post, but its timing. He seemed to assume that, after some time had passed, the policemen would have forgotten what they did to him – perhaps because this sort of everyday abuse was common, or so Benjamin appeared to think. I propose that behind his visibility reduction project is the assumption that end users may end up losing control over who can see a Facebook post ("the police could get word") when it goes viral (when it generates "a huge repercussion"). This assumption, and the notion of "virality" by interaction in general, seem to suggest a point of contact between two social imaginaries of Facebook's visibility regime. The vectors of sight and readability appear to be imagined by Benjamin as intertwined, as they are in the predictive visibility imaginary – but also as generating an exposure beyond his control, as in the uncontrollable visibility imaginary.

It seems that the social dimension of Benjamin's civic self-understanding is crucial to his project. He was not involved in any sort of crime and, in principle, should not be fearful of the police. However, he seemed to assume that being innocent meant very little against the authoritarianism of the police in Brazil. In being Black, young and living in a poor neighbourhood, he had "the profile of those who are murdered". "Just another junkie", they could lie after killing him. Benjamin's apparent understanding of himself as a part of a second-class citizenry ("Who will have more voice – my mom... or the police?) apparently forced him to try to balance the urge to seek accountability and the fear that, were his expressions heard, he could be murdered.

Similar to what I described in Chapter 7, none of the interviewees appeared satisfied with only intervening through non-civic voice elements. In their attempts to control the visibility of their civic self-representations on Facebook, more direct interventions seemed necessary, as exemplified in the next few sections.

8.3. Visibility Reduction Through the Control of Civic Voice Expressions

The second part of this chapter analyses descriptions of visibility reduction projects that seem to involve transformations to civic voice expressions. I describe them as *misleading profiles, voice disguising, correction*, *voice deletion, voice suppression* and *voice disappearance*.

8.3.1. 'I Changed my Name to Arabic': Visibility Reduction Through Misleading Profiles

Fernanda, the engineer, described herself as passionate about progressive politics. She has used Facebook to disseminate news pieces, examine official documents and organize small gatherings to discuss topics such as elections and feminism. While she has been doing this for some years, the

political crisis rendered her expressions more intense – and riskier, she told me. During the 2014 elections, she was in a public square watching the transmission of a presidential debate, when she agreed to be interviewed by a journalist. Her progressive opinions became part of a video that was published on the Facebook page of a major Brazilian newspaper. She told me that her appearance in the video was "very short", but was enough to create an "enormous revolt" among some conservative end users:

> [8.5] A friend of mine wrote [tagging her], 'Fernanda, is that you?', right in the [comment section of the] link to the video [posted in the newspaper's Facebook page]. When I saw it, I told her to delete it. But my 'message requests' inbox was already like 'you will die,' this kind of stuff.

Underlying her description of this abuse is her apparent assumption that she has no control over her own visibility on Facebook: she had no say in her friend's action of "tagging" her in a comment of the post, which, also against her will, allowed strangers to identify her as the person in the video, visit her profile and send abusive messages via her inbox. "Tagging" seems to be associated with the idea that, on Facebook, end users' readability might be exploited by third parties – typical of the uncontrollable visibility imaginary. Usually associated with physical surveillance of prisoners and medical patients (Nellis, Beyens, & Kaminski, 2013), the term, in this context, means the ability to create a clickable link to someone's profile by typing the person's name on Facebook in e.g. a comment (Facebook, 2019b); this relies on the fact that the platform creates and maintains end-user databases. In the aforementioned scenario, "tagging" allowed Fernanda's friend to exert manual control over Fernanda's visibility, allowing others to also see her against her volition. Her description indicates that by lacking the ability to control who *reads* her, she also has no control over who can *interact* with her on Facebook – or so she seemingly assumed.

Fernanda's experience of harassment led her to adopt a project that goes beyond interface functionalities or talking only within certain spaces:

> [8.6] I had to start a different profile from the scratch, [with] my name in Arabic. This one is harder to find, folks can't tag me anymore. And that is the idea, because of this [harassment] story. I kept the [older] profile with my name, surname, my pic, but nothing since 2013. [Others say]: 'Fernanda, can I add you?'. [She says] 'sure, of course', and then I add them in the older profile. These [users] won't see any post, because I never post anything [in the older profile], I only rarely log onto it. Oh, there's this picture of that event, [people] tagged me? I go and 'like' the tagged picture. In the other, which has my very own name, but in Arabic, I have now many friends, most from my [original] city. Someone might even threaten me, but he can't disturb me in

> my workplace. They don't know who my boss is, can't come and bad-mouth me to my boss. They can't harm me.

In an attempt to regain control over who could see and interact with her, Fernanda told me she decided to construct a second profile. The original one was described as a form of professional front, a digital dummy that can be exploited by others (e.g. tagged) without causing her harm; she constructed it as strictly apolitical and mostly void of interactions. Her new profile was described as her civic persona, and it seemed to be crafted to maximize her control how she is seen and read. However, to achieve invisibility, she believed that a second profile was not enough, and decided to change her name using the Arabic alphabet. (This choice was not random: she is of Arabic descent.) Fernanda seems to assume that this renders her effectively invisible to any Brazilian user that tries to search for or tag her on Facebook. In her Arabic profile, she had "many friends", but they were from another city and they do not know any of her work colleagues and, thus, were unlikely to create professional problems. While the new profile did not render misrecognition impossible ("someone might… threaten me"), she said it was less likely to damage her professional life. This kind of visibility reduction project seems to be facilitated by an ensemble of social imaginaries within Facebook's visibility regime. If her assumptions about the need to reduce her visibility stemmed from the uncontrollable visibility imaginary, doing so would depend on there being ways to unilaterally counter such uncontrollability (consistent with the controllable visibility imaginary). Yet, her project did not depend on the tools explicitly provided by Facebook for such control (such as "Privacy Settings"), but was instead based on a functionality that was hardly designed to give end users greater control over their visibility ("Language Settings").

Fernanda might conceive of Facebook as both allowing others to see her against her will and supporting her ability to counter such arbitrary government. However, these possibilities only lead to a project vis-à-vis her understanding that, as a citizen, she is at risk. Fernanda appears to think that both strangers and work colleagues would be keen to punish her for her ideological stance. In a moment of backlash against the left in Brazil, she seemed to assume that her civic voice was not only part of a minority of progressives – thus, amenable to this kind of oversimplification – but also unable to resist this kind of professional risk. At a particular moment in our conversation, she told me that these imagined dispositions were part of Brazil's post-crisis climate: "[People have become] alienated. They don't understand the political position of different parties. They think I'm a *Petista*, they don't understand me – I'm not *Petista*".

The idea of risk can encompass darker scenarios, as I was told by other interviewees. First, take the case of Fabio, the tattoo shop manager. During my initial observation of his profile, I noticed that his picture showed a man with his head completely hooded. It looked like an original picture – that is, one taken by him, but it was impossible to discern his facial features. In our interview, I asked why he posted that particular photo. He replied:

> [8.7] To post my picture, or of my daughters, it's almost dangerous. We are now in a regime [the post-impeachment government of Michel Temer] that is not only conservative, [but also] with people who are on the side of the hatred, who say that is cool to slaughter others. This is dangerous, really. I'm afraid, like, if someone says, 'this one here [Fabio] is bothering'. Then, in a state of exception, in which people want to restrict all rights, it seems obvious to me that expose yourself like this is dangerous. A military coup might be coming. Then, you don't have any freedom anymore, people can get into your house, find you there, and God knows what can happen.

His imaginary of Facebook's visibility regime is similar to those in other accounts examined in this section. Assumptions of uncontrollability (anyone can see his profile picture) invoke assumptions of control (Facebook allows him to post a picture without his face). However, for Fabio, the danger to be avoided is not being fired, but getting arrested or something worse. Not much different from what happened during the military dictatorship, he seems to believe that, in post-crisis Brazil, dissenting voices such as his might be violently repressed – "God knows what can happen". To avoid this possibility, Fabio said that the safer course of action is making himself physically unidentifiable. This limited anonymity gives him some leeway to remain politically "active". Framing his reasoning were also assumptions about Brazil's authoritarian history. In our conversation, Bruno demonstrated to be well aware of what happened during the military dictatorship to dissenters like him, and seemed to envision a return to those conditions – facilitated by Facebook.

Maria, the conservative event organizer, also told me a disturbing story. She was unemployed at the time of our interview and reported spending large parts of her time engaging in intense disputes and interactions with a relatively small, but highly active group of other conservative end users on Facebook and other platforms. When I asked if I could interview her, I noticed that her Facebook profile stated that she lived in another Brazilian city, not São Paulo. She agreed to be interviewed and, somewhat interestingly, arranged to meet in a café in São Paulo and not in the city that appeared on her profile. When I asked her about this, she told me that the city information on her profile was false, a response to threats she had received:

> [8.9] They started to send threatening emails, saying they are coming for my mom, my sister. They send personal information, like where you live. They said they are going

> to kill me, to rape me. I joke about it, but I really got worried when they said they would plant a bomb in my car. It's better [to change her city on Facebook]. You put together 'Rambos' and Internet wankers… they can actually do it.

Maria told me she has no concrete clues as to why she has been harassed, but believes that the threats were triggered by a dispute with an opponent group of conservative users. She found out about the threats after receiving screenshots of conversations about how to rape and kill her. "Do you wanna see it?", she asked me, pulling her phone and showing a screenshot of what seemed a Brazilian version of 4Chan, the anonymous imageboard website. The screenshot showed a picture of a scruffy-looking man. "This is the one who wants to rape me. Then he does these photo montages with my pictures, as if he were raping me".

What is at play in her account, it seems, is control over her image, which can be seen, and may be copied and manipulated into violent montages. She assumed that there is little that she can do about these already circulating visual composites, but Facebook's configuration cannot stop her from lying, which might mislead harassers about her whereabouts, a project that is consistent with the controllable visibility imaginary. As in the other cases explored above, Maria's assumptions of controllability seem to be invoked only in response to assumptions of lack of control. In conjunction with these unbalanced imagined regimes, there were different assumptions about others – not recruiters, clients, work colleagues or an authoritarian government, but ideologically like-minded strangers who appeared to be assumed by Maria as willing to physically harm her due to a dispute that even she did not fully comprehend. Given the rape threats, it is difficult not to see the links between her assumed vulnerability and a much older political issue – Brazil's deeply rooted sexism (Section 2.2).

In Fabio's and Maria's descriptions, there seems to be a mismatch between their assumed risks and the capacity of their visibility reduction projects to tackle these risks. Fabio knew that an authoritarian government can find his picture through other ways – thus, why not show his face?; Maria has even received an email containing all her "personal information" – thus, why lie about her city? I suggest that their apparently ineffective projects point to how much they care about their visibility: any small amount of control is worth grabbing.

While Maria's, Fabio's and Fernanda's projects do not involve the transformation of their posts, I suggest that they imply a transformation of their voices inasmuch as they involve changing elements of *who* is speaking on Facebook – in minor (Maria, Fabio) or major (Fernanda) ways. The next section starts to consider examples of changes to participants' civic voice expressions.

8.3.2. 'It Was a Political Post, But Between the Lines': Visibility Reduction Through Voice Disguising

Consider first what Gael, the graphic artist, told me. He was talking about how Facebook's "bubble" "induces narcissism" when he said:

> [8.10] Facebook incentivises me to be more like myself, more and more radicalised and selecting people who applaud my radicality.
>
> [JCM] Do you feel this yourself?
>
> Oh yeah, all the time. That's when the irony comes in. When the Supreme Court guy's plane crashed, I was like posting conspiracy theories. I was like, 'It was the Russians!'. Some folks believed, others didn't, like 'But is this true? What is your source?', and I was like, 'The source is the Internet! Embrace the post-truth' [laughter]. Irony provides a kind of relief. Sometimes there is this discomfort. You kind of get bored. When everybody starts to say the same shit. Example: the [then São Paulo's former mayor João] Dória x graffiti controversy[59]. In the first days I posted a lot. In the third day, I got bored. Then I begin to get oblique, ironic. Like, I'm [saying]: 'Dória is ridiculous, a hick'. But then it comes a moment that you get fed up and say: 'No, let's just post [pictures] of beautiful graffities in other cities without any comment'. Just leave it there, don't get into [the discussion]. As if there was this group of people talking excitedly and you're like seeing them from a distance.

At a different moment in the interview, Gael told me that his personal "bubble" is composed of a "minority of the minority of artists who live in *Pinheiros* [a bohemian middle-class neighbourhood in São Paulo], graffiti people, alternative folks". Living within this bubble, especially in moments of acute political turmoil, can be an uncomfortable and boring experience, Gael said. "When everybody starts to say the same shit", it apparently becomes difficult to have an original voice; his civic self-understanding is destabilized. That is when "irony comes in", he said. In practice, this could mean engaging jokingly in conspiracy theories about the death of Teori Zavaski, the Supreme Court Judge who presided over the Car Wash Operation and died in a plane crash in 2017; eulogizing "post-truth"; or merely posting enigmatic pictures, instead of declaring his position in the controversy. Gael prefers to be "oblique" and to disguise what he truly thinks.

Irony can be employed for other, more familiar reasons – and lead to distinct actions. Take the case of Alex, the IT professional, who told me that:

> [8.11] You can't do conspiracy theories [on Facebook] because you won't be able to defend yourself. Like, I think something is true, but how can I prove it? The death of this

[59] He is referring to a public controversy in 2017 over the erasing of the graffiti in one of São Paulo's main avenues, by the then conservative mayor, João Dória.

> [Supreme Court] Justice, [for instance]. When it happened I posted on Facebook: 'These folks [leftist politicians investigated in the Car Wash Operation] have luck, everyone dies in the most fitting moments, these fellows are lucky'. What was that, man? Way too much of a coincidence. But we are in their hands [the investigated politicians]. It's no use, sometimes there is no use in lashing out.

Like Gael, Alex is also suspicious of the sudden death of Justice Zavaski. However, suggesting that the judge was murdered, and that this was organized by the politicians harmed by the investigations he presided over, might put him at risk, he seems to assume. Thus, Alex prefers to position himself in irony, underlining the coincidence ("lucky people"/"people of luck") to highlight the absurdity of the idea that Zavaski's death was a coincidence. Here, irony, arguably, plays the political role of "protective cover of indirection" (Hutcheon, 2003, p. 15): he said something without saying it. Behind Alex's actions there appears to be the assumption that what he writes on his private Facebook timeline could potentially be seen by anyone, regardless of his wishes, which is consistent with the uncontrollable visibility imaginary. This sort of regime, Alex appears to imagine, benefits the "left" – the group that might hunt him down were he to say exactly what he believes about the death of Zavaski (recall his quote on leftists using "big data" to monitor platforms in Section 6.41).

Others seem to believe that even irony is too risky and prefer to resort to a different kind of rhetorical disguise – subtlety. The politically progressive nurse Patricia was one of the interviewees most concerned about the possibility of being observed by others on Facebook. However, being monitored by politicians was the least of her worries:

> [8.12] Mostly my boss, I know she sees. The girls who are friends with her [the boss], they have everyone on Facebook precisely to keep an eye on us. They had never 'liked' anything I published. [But one day] when I posted about a restaurant, [one of the friends commented]: 'Look at this, boss'. Then I said… wow! I mean… In the same way that I see things I don't like, I know they might be seeing. I know that there is a lot of people who see what I post. Everyone is watching.

Even when end users do not "like" her posts, Patricia "knows" that "everyone is", at least potentially, "watching". This might be interpreted as another facet of the uncontrollable visibility imaginary, according to which end users can systematically exploit Facebook's end user interface or, in Patricia's words, "keep an eye on" her. This possibility is crucial to understanding how she has constructed her civic voice on Facebook since the beginning of the crisis:

> [8.13] My voice itself, I don't put it [on Facebook]. I'm afraid of losing my job. People are mostly super conservative. People are conflating things. What if my boss sees it and says, 'Patricia might be a *Petista*, unionised, may sue the hospital, organize a strike'. I'm afraid. But they don't know much about politics, so if I post one thing or another,

> they don't realize. [It was] Christmas season, and I wrote: 'So many kids asking for lots of gifts, and my son only asked for a coloured pencils set'. More than 100 people 'liked'. You see, it was a political post, but very much between the lines. Those who understood it, understood. Those who didn't found it cute. You have to find an opening. We do politics all the time. It's not about hoisting a flag but showing who we are.

Instead of being "explicit", Patricia may post "one thing or another" in a way that her work colleagues will not "realize" is political. In her example, when she talked about not buying expensive gifts for her son, she managed to position herself as critical of consumerism, thus, of capitalism and somewhere on the left of the political spectrum. However, it generated no controversy because this positioning was constructed as subtle – to be read "between the lines".

In addition to her conception of the platform's visibility regime as uncontrollable, is, again, an understanding of her civic voice as relatively precarious. She suggested that, since 2014, when the political crisis deepened, people had begun to conflate the professional and the political. As a leftist, she appears to consider herself part of an ideological minority, unable to effectively challenge the actions of those others. Work colleagues were conceived of "mostly" as conservatives, a little ignorant of politics and willing to punish her professionally solely because they disagree with her political leanings. Subtlety seems to be employed to try to strike a balance between protecting her job (particularly at a moment of economic crisis) and maintaining the possibility of expressing her civic voice in minimal accordance with her civic self-understanding ("it's about… showing who we are").

Misleading others about who they are or exerting a disguised voice were arguably forms of obfuscation, whereby interviewees concealed their voices by representing themselves in particular ways (and not, for instance, by using technology – see e.g. Brunton and Nissenbaum, 2015); however, they also described more literal forms of invisibilization, as discussed in the next four sections.

8.3.3. 'Don't be Sexist, Homophobic, Patriarchalist': Visibility Reduction Through Voice Correction

Artur, the documentarist, told me that he talks differently about politics because of who, in his mind, observes him on the platform. He said, in an ironic tone:

> [8.14] Facebook has become an amazing bubble of liberal progressive left people... So I'm mega careful, in particular in relation to things I agree with. I'm a defender of the gay movement, LGBT, women, human rights. [But] folks are vigilant. If you make a joke that might be considered sexist, folks will attack you, and rightly so. They won't spare you just because you're their friend. I try to be careful because I think that these movements are sometimes radical. But I'm in favour of their radicality. So I think our role as White, highly-educated, middle-class men is to police ourselves and be very

> careful with what we say. Don't be sexist, don't be homophobic, don't be patriarchalist, don't exclude anyone in any way. Because sometimes, unintentionally, you might exclude someone, some group… Like, if I'm posting something defending the MST [*Movimento Rural Sem-Terra*, a social movement that advocates for access to land in Brazil], is this comment defending the MST in detriment to another population? Who doesn't do this, is at risk [of being attacked by fellow leftists].

Artur reported being "mega careful", avoiding being "sexist", "homophobic", "patriarchal" and – more generally – excluding. As if ticking off a mental check list of possible problems, he makes sure to "police" himself. That is, under other visibility conditions, he could say "things" "unintentionally" that he, in fact, disagrees with. But not on Facebook. Artur seems to believe that his posts will appear to those within his "amazing bubble of liberal leftists". As he explained at another moment in our interview (see Excerpt 6.17), this "bubble" is related to an "algorithm" that is designed to "please him" by presenting him with what he has previously interacted with, an assumption that seems consistent with the predictive visibility imaginary. This imaginary orients him to imagine a well-defined group of observers of his posts: friends who are part of "the gay movement, LGBT, women, human rights". In conjunction with this imaginary is the implicit understanding that these others were willing to criticize him. As he said, "folks are vigilant". This seems to indicate a different consequence of a polarized political climate: one might be attacked not only by opponents for being on the opposite side, but also by allies for not expressing a sufficiently progressive civic voice. Similar to Helena in the context of her "fundamentalist" conservative readers (Excerpt 7.15), any deviation in the coherence of Artur's civic voice may become a reason for criticism, he assumes. However, if these criticisms were threatening, it was because of his ambivalence in relation to how he conceives his own voice. Despite a desire to be a hard-core progressive, Artur saw himself as "at risk" of contradicting his own values – by being sexist, for instance. The shadow of an unforgiving ideological "bubble" seems to remind him to hone his impure edges, destabilizing and reconstructing the meaning of what being a good citizen means for him.

Self-invisibilization may also take the form of protective deletion.

8.3.4. 'This One I Deleted': Visibility Reduction Through Voice Deletion

In addition to carefully considering whether he should expose his face on Facebook, as discussed above, Fabio sometimes deletes political posts from the platform:

> [8.15] The other day I posted something about the husband of my wife's boss. They are of a different [ideological] bunch, voted for Dória [the then conservative Mayor of São Paulo]. Then I thought, 'oh, no, fuck, no, I spoke about him without saying his name, but [clearly] was about him'. This one I deleted. But it's rare.

Fabio deleted his post because he feared the conservative husband of his wife's boss could see a post in which Fabio had made an indirect political joke about him. There was no clear reason for him to think that this would happen (he was not Fabio's "friend" on Facebook"), or that his wife's boss or her husband would understand the joke as being about him. Yet Fabio seemed to assume that, on Facebook, it is virtually impossible to know who sees or does not see a post. And he had a lot to lose, he said. When we spoke, Fabio had just been fired from a company whose revenue had nosedived due to the Brazilian recession. His wife had become the sole earner in the household. Consequently, the mere chance of upsetting his wife's boss became too risky.

Other physical dangers were also discussed. I met Telma, the musician, in the squat where she was living with her partner and an 18-month-old baby boy. Telma was politically progressive and, some time earlier, had embarked on a bitter inbox discussion with a former boss who, since Dilma Rousseff's impeachment, had "freaked out" and "became a far-rightist". During the course of this acrimonious discussion, the former boss had copied Telma's profile picture, which showed her with her son, and "edited it to add a "#Bolsonaro2018 frame" [60] on it and then "shared it". "It was a persecution!", she said.

> [8.16] I've done it [deleted a post]. But it was more because I was afraid of exposing my son. [The post] was about feminism. These anti-feminist guys are really aggressive. I think they might come and get me in my house. I do my best to not publish my location and stuff. But there's always that dumb relative who goes [and posts in her timeline]: 'Hey, Telma, when are you coming to visit us in the city X'? I'm not afraid of them [the government], I'm afraid of people who can strike me more directly.

Like Benjamin (Excerpt 8.4) and Maria (Excerpt 8.9), Telma feared physical harm for expressing her civic voice ("they might get me in my house"). She considers opponents of feminism to be particularly "aggressive" – an assumption likely informed by Brazil's sexism (Section 2.2). Apparently based on the uncontrollable visibility imaginary, Telma believes that users have no say over how others talk about them on the platform, as even a well-intentioned "relative" can inadvertently reveal someone's geographical location. Implicit in her description is an understanding of how motherhood might put her at further risk – in particular, when talking about feminism. It seems that, had she been the only person at risk, she would not have deleted the post. However, as a mother, she had much more to lose.

[60] A Facebook picture frame used by supporters of the then far-right candidate for the 2018 presidential elections, Jair Bolsonaro.

Next, I analyse cases in where the invisibilization comes before the voice is expressed.

8.3.5. 'Maybe Now I'll Be More Careful': Visibility Reduction Through Voice Suppression

From the accounts described above, the deletion of a political post appears to be a costly action, only taken if negative consequences are otherwise expected. The *suppression* of civic voice expressions, on the other hand, seems to respond to multiple presumptions. Take, for example, Octavio, the cultural producer. At the time of my fieldwork, a conservative mayor had just been elected to govern the small city where he lives, one hour from São Paulo. Octavio, who is gay, wanted to continue to be a member of a municipal council where citizens discuss LGBT issues. When we met, he was wondering whether he should criticize the mayor:

> [8.17] Maybe now, the way I'll talk about the city, I'll be more careful. Until I have more contact with the people of this new municipal administration, so I can know my limits. I want to be in this role [in the municipal council]… It could be that much of this fear is just me thinking I'm more important [than he actually is]. But it can be the opposite. We are walking in the wire – to what extent we are observed or [if] it's an arrogance to think that we are been observed. But the [new] mayor recently greeted a leftist and called her by her name. And he had never had any contact with her, he was not in her Facebook. And he greeted her by the name, he knew who she was. Governments create these [fake] profiles, they do monitor. It's so simple.

In the above excerpt, the uncontrollable visibility imaginary takes the form of a government's ability to create fake profiles to "monitor" certain individuals. Implied in this description is not only how Facebook's visibility regime works, but also the idea that politicians could be actively spying on citizens. This suggests that this kind of activity could also be a part of local level politicians' repertoires; after all, it is so "simple" to do, he said.

For Octavio, it seems, this sort of monitoring is easy, but not necessarily employed. He reflected that considering himself as being monitored is perhaps a self-centred fantasy, an "arrogant" understanding of his own voice. At the same time, Octavio appeared to wonder why the mayor greeted someone whom he had never met before by name. Due to the assumed possibility of monitoring, people like him have to live with this ambivalence, deciding for themselves when to attend to the possibility of dataveillance and the harms it might entail – to "walk on the wire", as he put it. In his description, what seems to trigger his doubts is the possibility that, as an aspiring member of the new LGBT municipal council, he might well be one of the new mayor's targets for monitoring. It is precisely this prospect of developing an "important" civic voice that reminds him of the risks involved in his attempt to develop an "important" civic voice, I suggest.

Rafael, the conservative undergraduate law student, also thinks that "surely, political monitoring is a very common thing". However, he had even darker notions about politicians:

> [8.18] I avoid posting about drugs. *PT* [Workers' Party] for instance, is a party with strong connections with *Comando Vermelho*[61] [Red Command, one of the largest criminal organizations in Brazil]. I fear [leftists parties will see], I fear what might happen. This is heavy stuff, drugs, drug trafficking. And over time, I would deepen [his posts on it]. Because I'm like this: when I start to talk about something, I go deep.

Crucial to his reported decision not to discuss the alleged relation of leftist parties to organized crime, is his assumption that these parties are violent and, arguably, willing to harm him physically. While this might not happen to everyone, but could happen to him. He understands himself to be the kind of citizen who, when he starts to talk about this kind of "heavy" topic, will "go deep" and eventually become "someone" who is targeted by "political monitoring". Similar to Octavio's example, there is the understanding of how the importance of his civic voice might render it risky. By not saying *everything* that he wants to say, he may at least be able to continue saying *some* things without fear.

If political parties were understood by some as able to be physically violent, it is not surprising that fear of police violence is related to civic voice suppression. Consider what Miguel, the public policy student, told me:

> [8.19] Once I witnessed a situation of police abuse against some young men. We were in the same bus stop. The cops first searched [the men], then they hit them and ended up breaking the arm of one of the kids. Then I made a post about it. [But] I thought that if the policemen saw [Miguel's post] they could retaliate against me, but I didn't want to stay silent either. So, I didn't say where it happened, I just said that I witnessed a case like this and that and published. I think I was able to convey the message, but these people [the policemen] will never be punished.

I then asked how he thought the police could see his post:

> [8.20] Someone could have a common friend, and this person could end up seeing [the post], or someone could see and show it to the police. Not to harm me, but to demand some explanation.

Miguel's depicted project is similar to Benjamin's (Excerpt 8.4 above) in that both attempted to reduce the reach of a text about police abuse. However, instead of intentionally trying to reduce the chances of being seen, as Benjamin did, Miguel suppressed geographical details that could lead to the identification of the perpetrators of the abuse. Like Benjamin, Miguel appeared to try to retain

[61] There are no evidences to support this allegation.

the ability of expressing his voice ("I didn't want to be silent") while avoiding the possibility of suffering "retaliations". While the post might not lead the policemen to be "punished" (i.e. Miguel will not be fully heard), it might manage to "convey" a "message" of how gratuitous police violence can be in Brazil, particularly towards certain people. However, it is not that the police necessarily monitor him on the platform: visibility might occur through an accidental link between his and others' networks, or a dynamic that has little to do with Facebook. This is exemplified in his fear that one of his own friends might read his post and contact the police to "demand an explanation" – similar to the idea of "someone who knows someone" explored in Section 6.4.1. The idea of policemen as willing to "retaliate" against a critical citizen is, in turn, linked, at least partially, to Miguel's civic self-understanding. While not Black, he comes from a poor area of greater São Paulo. Like Benjamin, he takes believes that police violence against people like him in Brazil often is gratuitous and goes unchallenged.

So far, these projects of visibility reduction through self-invisibilization refer to human observers. Consider, however, what the real estate agent Antonio told me:

> [8.21] If you heavily criticize politicians, it [Facebook] deletes [the post]. If I was to say what I really think, what I think of Brazil's politics… [he would be blocked]. That [Supreme Court Justice] Gilmar Mendes had to be in jail [for instance].

Most of my conversation with Antonio was devoted to his debasing of all major Brazilian politicians – except Jair Bolsonaro, whom he supported. Not all criticisms could be voiced on Facebook, though, he said: the platform would "delete" them, "block" his profile and prevent him from saying anything at all. Thus, he prefers to just supress some of his thoughts. However, his description implies that the expected act of external invisibilization that prompted his own invisibilization is governed by a kind of political censorship that is typical of the uncontrollable visibility imaginary. Antonio appeared to assume that "Facebook" is somehow able to discern the tone and topic of the post and take down only those which express "heavy" political criticism.

The descriptions about civic voice suppression analysed in this section relate to actions enabled by the implicit understanding that, on Facebook, one has ultimately no control over how one is read or seen. However, there may be other social imaginaries at play. For instance, Ava, a junior marketer who fiercely defended feminism on her Facebook profile and had led in-person workshops on the topic, told me:

[8.22] I take into consideration my security. Some things I don't feel comfortable talking about [on Facebook]. Feminism – it can be really dangerous. We get death threats, pictures of women being murdered with a note: 'This can happen to you'. Topics that are more impactful I don't talk about on social media. I talk about them during my workshops, which is a safer situation for me. To talk about rape [for instance], which I think is very basic, it needs to be talked about, by everyone. But it's too big a taboo. It's dangerous to talk about [rape]. I would not like to have to wear to so many armours, to need so many armours. It's unfair. But I have to go in baby steps, so as to not cause more holes than I already cause. Because any small comma that you say, it might go viral, and it might [create a] backlash against you.

Ava's project is costly to her. Although convinced that "impactful" topics such as rape "need to be talked about, by everyone", she feels compelled to wear "armours" and supress these themes. This project might be "unfair", she surmises, but at least it avoids her being exposed to misogynist hatred and receiving death threats. Underlying this project is the assumption that, on Facebook, a civic voice expression can go "viral" even if its author does not want it to. As seen in Section 8.2.3, virality seems situated at the limits of the predictive and uncontrollable visibility imaginaries. Combined with these assumptions on how the platform governs visibility is, yet again, an assumption that some end users might be eager to harass and, possibly, physically harm her. There is also a civic self-understanding of being socially vulnerable, incapable of avoiding these menaces without being supressed.

A second example of how the predictive visibility imaginary might inform the suppression of civic voice was given by Adão, the high-school teacher. According to him, his professional life influenced his decision to "omit" certain ideas:

[8.23] In 2014, I used to write things that were a little angrier. Then, some colleagues, former teachers, began to say: 'Gosh, why are you so angry at Dilma [Rousseff, the impeached president]?' People would tell me: 'Adão, don't you think that your criticisms weaken the government and help the enemy [conservatives]?' I realized: this is going to taint me. So, what did I do? I omitted myself. It's not that I wrote things I didn't agree with, I just didn't write at all.

At different moments in our conversation, Adão talked about how "bubbles" are created by both the frequency of his interactions with others and his boundary making actions ("block", "unfollow", "unfriend" – see Excerpt 5.13). This understanding, consistent with both the predictive and controllable visibility imaginaries, seems to underlie his voice suppression. Those who could "taint" Adão were not violent policemen, authoritarian politicians or aggressive misogynists, but "former teachers" who were on the same ideological side and interacted with his posts, but did not necessarily agree with all the expressions of his civic voice. At the same time, given that these same

people could potentially be helpful for his career in the future, it was not advisable to cut them off (e.g. "block" them). That is, they were, at least in 2014, a dissonant part of what Adão thought of as his "bubble". The presumption that these individuals could, indeed, undermine his professional goals is at least partially related to a political climate where dissent within the same ideological camp seems understood as favouring "the enemy". In addition, there is his standing before these "former teachers": the vulnerability of his civic voice seems to derive from a professional inequality. At the time of the visibility reduction project he narrated, Adão was a young doctoral student who wanted to be an academic. Those "teachers" were already within academia, people who could decide whether he would be able to find a job.

Next, I analyse accounts about how end users may at times try to make their civic voices disappear completely from Facebook.

8.3.6. 'I'm Cutting Myself Out of It': Visibility Reduction Through Voice Disappearance

Above, I discussed how Gael employed irony to try to the reconstruct his civic individuality within the assumed sameness of his "bubble". However, later in our conversation, Gael said he was increasingly sceptical of Facebook as a space to talk about politics:

> [8.24] I'm cutting myself out of it. I kind of accepted that fascism is coming. People's level of hatred is so high that is has become like a sewer that must spill over. I believe Facebook doesn't cause it, but it amplifies it, you know? The bubble exacerbates it.

I then asked if he felt that he was heard on the platform, to which he replied:

> [8.25] Oh, no, no damn way. There are so many [voices], one more voice is very little. People hear me, you know, but because it's fun. I don't think it causes any real change. In my personal profile it's 60 'likes', five 'shares,' max. [And] those who hear me are the people who already agree with me. It's kind of impossible, when you think about it. It's easier to be heard in-person. In those neighbourhood meetings, as it's a geographic community, there're people from all sides, and you're like sitting at the square's benches, and then you have some cool discussions. Over there, people will say, 'I'm in favour of the death penalty,' and, 'oh, OK, let's discuss'. You can talk to people, look at their eyeball. Now, if I say that death penalty is an absurd [on Facebook], I'll be heard by those who already think like this. The revengeful folks [who approve of death penalty], they won't' [listen].

Gael's visibility reduction project is one of inaction. What apparently drives his plan to "cut" himself "out" is an informed fatalism: the "wave" of "fascism is coming" and there is nothing he can do about it. Of interest to me is the role played by Facebook's imagined visibility regime in his project. Gael is talking again about "bubbles" – an element, which, as described above, brings together the

predictive and the controllable visibility imaginaries. For him, his "bubble" might "hear" him, as evidenced by some dozens of "likes" and "shares" his posts usually receive. However, this did not translate into his feeling heard. These people, he said, "already agree" with him. Being recognized as a citizen would involve bringing about some kind of political change, which would require his modifying the opinion of those outside his "bubble" – "the revengeful folks" who disagree with him.

The importance of his imaginary of Facebook's visibility regime was demonstrated in his comparison between the platform and a different political space – a group of people he meets frequently to discuss neighbourhood issues. In these in-person interactions, guided by a "geographical", as he said, not algorithmic logic, it is much easier to see and be seen and, thus, to convince others of his point of view – as he said, to "be heard". It seems, then, that Gael's wanting to stop talking about politics on Facebook is not because he imagines the platform's regime as allowing a bunch of "revengeful" others to uncontrollably see and interact with him. Instead, the regime creates an unsurmountable *distance* from these others. In creating "bubbles", Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime renders civic voices useless – at least according to Gael's understanding of what it means to be heard.

Consider, also, the case of the copywriter Humberto. He is a transgender man who became involved in politics in 2013, at the onset of the Brazilian political crisis. At the time, Humberto identified as a gay woman, but, over time, he came to understand himself as a man. Then, the two processes – the Brazilian crisis and his individual identity transformation – became fused in his online activities. When I asked him how he participated politically on Facebook, he said: "My biggest political participation was that I transitioned online, in the social network, publicly". This involved posting texts about his own experience, about transgender politics, communicating with other transgender men and, crucially, exposing his new physical self in pictures. Being a transgender person was one of Humberto's most important expressions of civic voice. When we spoke, though, he had "stopped using social media just for the sake of using it":

> [8.26] I'm learning how to deal more intelligently with social media, [with] more autonomy in relation to how I expose myself. Be smarter with my image, my security. I'm very vulnerable on social media, because there're these people, these right-wingers. Today, I'm marked on social media. Anything I publish gets me blocked for 30 days. One of my posts, it had no image, but I was blocked for 'nudity'. I'm quite persecuted. My page was taken down because of hackers' attacks. Since my pictures have circulated many times, in the same day Facebook finds it and blocks [he]. It's not about *me* [original emphasis], but somehow I feel much more monitored. Social media are very hostile to me. I can't show myself as I like, as I see myself, as I want to

> show myself to friends. Facebook is not an egalitarian experience, in particular to transgender bodies. Going to the beach, to the swimming pool – it's hard work for me. And then, when I do go I want to take a picture, I want to post it on Face[book], and I can't. Any small thing attracts lots of haters, so it's a hostile place. I can't, my identity is not complete. It's a halved experience.

Like Gael's, Humberto's project is one of inaction. At the time of our conversation, he was "learning" how use the platform only as a tool to organize in-person events. On the one hand, he assumes that "haters" constantly flag up his pictures, leading the moderation system to take these photos down – what, given the idea of an interactional link between past and present, is consistent with the predictive visibility imaginary. On the other hand, Facebook has learned to "find" and read his naked torso as a necessary breach of community standards. Consequently, it will unilaterally and automatically take down his posts – consistent with the uncontrollable visibility imaginary. By being incapable of controlling how he is seen and read in the platform, Humberto appeared to had lost the ability to be heard on the platform in a way that is minimally respectful of the intertwining between his civic voice and gender ("I can't show myself… it's a hostile place"). This reported sense of inadequacy between his civic self-understanding and imagined visibility regime can be understood as an example of the platform's well-known failure to accept transgender people's specificities (see e.g. Koebler & Cox), a failure that cannot be disentangled from the acute level of prejudice transgender individuals suffer in all instances of their lives, particularly in Brazil (Section 2.2).

Whether Gael and Humberto will be able to stay away from political posts on Facebook is a reasonable question since, as other interviewees told me, doing politics on Facebook can be understood as "addictive". In fact, having a break from this "addiction" is the reason why the video-maker Amanda sometimes tried to stop expressing her civic voice on Facebook completely:

> [8.27] You log in to see one thing, suddenly you are seeing something else. It's a bit... I think that this what the algorithm is for. Because you see something, and below there's something else about the same topic, and then you start to click in lots of links. When you realize, you've lost half-hour in it. On Facebook I can't stop talking about politics, it's like an addiction. It's insane. If you're on it, it seems as if you want to remain there, more and more, like an endless thing. It's because I can't help but feel outraged by things, so I want to fight. Sometimes I feel intoxicated on Facebook, then I get out of São Paulo, to disconnect. To disconnect I need to either be outside of my house or out of São Paulo. My mobile phone is prepaid, so I rarely have credits, [her data plan] ends up rather quickly, then I have to do something else, go to the beach, have a real life.

For Amanda, it is not enough (or possible) to merely filter out politics from her Facebook activities: she feels obliged to "disconnect" totally. This might entail purposefully leaving São Paulo or,

at the very least, her home. On these occasions, the limited connectivity of her pre-paid mobile phone prevents her from accessing Facebook.

The drastic nature of these measures is described by her as proportional response to the platform's attempts to prod her into exerting her civic voice ("I can't stop talking about politics… it seems you want more and more"). In her account, this sort of perceptible nudging operates through an "algorithm" designed to offer a never-ending stream of pleasant content and keep her glued to the platform – which is consistent with the predictive visibility imaginary. However, the "algorithm" can produce this "kind of addiction" because it is described as coupled with Amanda's reported inability not to feel "outraged" by the "things" she sees on the platform – not to want to "fight for [what is right]". This, in her case, is linked to Brazil's inequalities.

Either *ex-ante* (*voice suppression* and *disappearance*) or *ex-post* (*deletion*), the self-invisibilizations described in the last three sections are characterized by the withholding of civic voice expressions that participants would like to convey were it not for probability that such communication could be harmful to them. The last part of the chapter explores descriptions about why users reported *not wanting to* engage in visibility reduction projects.

8.4. Rejecting Visibility Reduction Projects

Many participants talked about not enacting at least certain visibility reduction projects. This section identifies two main reported reasons behind these decisions: the idea that reducing the visibility of one's civic voice expressions is *unnecessary* and/or *unacceptable*.

8.4.1. 'I'm Not Instigating Any Revolution': Visibility Reduction as an Unnecessary Project

For some interviewees, the fact that malicious state agents could be able to read and see their civic voice expressions on Facebook did not appear as a deterrent. Julia, the freelance journalist, said:

[8.28] I'm not instigating any revolution, any protest, directly. So, I'm not really worried.

As it became clear at multiple moments of our conversation, Julia seemed to assume that, on Facebook, as in the Internet more generally, "everything" she does is observed by "someone" (see Excerpt 6.10). This implicit understanding – consistent with the uncontrollable visibility imaginary – did not, however, change her civic voice expressions. In her mind, these expressions do not instigate "a revolution" or even a "protest". Julia appears to assume that she is protected by its presumed lack of relevance.

Other participants declared they had very little to *gain* from enacting this sort of project. For instance, Maria, the event organizer, said:

> [8.29] It never happened [a job interview]. Have a look at the stuff I say on my videos and tell me – who is going to give me a job? If it's very hard for anyone, imagine how hard it's for me. Any HR [department] sees it, logically. I'm screwed. [But won't censor her actions because] even if I delete [her posts and videos], there will be something somewhere [in the Internet]. So, I won't [delete or stop talking about politics]. Once you're in [politics], you can't go back.

Maria said that her videos on politics, in which she curses and mocks both progressives and moderate conservatives, cannot simply be deleted by her, even if she wanted to do so. Coupled with the assumption that recruiters not only "logically" do online searches about job candidates but also are unwilling to hire individuals from her ideological leaning, this other instantiation of the uncontrollable visibility imaginary (similar to concerns addressed by debates on the "right to be forgotten"[62]) has rendered Maria unemployable ("who is going to give me a job?") – or so she seems to believe. The damage has already been done – so why bother to curb her voice?, she seems to ask herself. The dancer Lorena provided a similar, but gloomier description.

> [8.30] Oh yeah [the police monitor her]. So far nothing has happened – but I know one day it may happen. Of course, I would be pissed if the police arrested me arbitrarily and killed me. It's possible, but I won't stop talking. Because this [police violence] can happen if I'm in a street protest, or if I'm just sitting over there and they don't like my guts and decide to arrest me. So, like, I'm not afraid of the state because the state can murder me in many ways.

Lorena's disinterest in limiting the visibility of her voice is not related to her inability to truly erase her online presence (like Maria) or to her apparent irrelevance of her civic voice (like Julia). The point for her is that she would be at risk even if she never spoke on Facebook. As a Black woman who dares to talk about politics, Lorena might be violently repressed "in many ways" – monitoring Facebook is just one and, arguably, a minor gateway to this risk. The police might kill her "in a protest… just sitting over there", she said, pointing to a public square next to the bar where we were talking. There is nothing to be gained from reducing her visibility on Facebook because she cannot imagine herself a proper citizen.

[62] See Jones (2018) for an ample discussion on this topic.

Other interviewees seemed to believe that, while Facebook's visibility regime allows for dataveillance, those who would want to engage in such practice are technically incapable of doing so. Pedro, the publishing company employee, provided an example of this assumption. He told me that he is sure that Facebook data is exploited by state agents – but not *Brazilian* state agents.

> [8.31] No, not in Brazil. I can't see the expertise for this. For instance, they haven't managed to decrypt those WhatsApp chats for the Car Wash [Operation]. And it's a national issue, everyone is paying attention to it. I also think that Facebook would not do it [cooperate]. About this, I'm not that paranoid. I won't lie – it can happen. But I don't see Brazil['s state agents] as having the expertise to do it.

If Pedro is not "that paranoid" about being monitored by state agents it is because "Brazil" did not have the "expertise" to exploit Facebook data – unless Facebook cooperates, which it "would not", he said. Pedro compares this possibility to federal prosecutors' inability to decrypt some crucial WhatsApp data in the course of the Car Wash Operation. If digital data could not be retrieved in that "national" situation, to which "everyone is paying attention", it is unlikely that something similar could be done with Facebook data, Pedro appears to assume. Therefore, trying to invisibilise himself is unnecessary. For other interviewees, restraining their civic voice expressions seems to be too *costly*, as I show next.

8.4.2. 'I Have to Make this Comment': Visibility Reduction as an Unacceptable Project

When I asked Octavio if his political participation on Facebook was influenced by his assumption that he is observed, the cultural producer said:

> [8.32] I can't really understand the scale of this control but I wouldn't be able to leave this space. Because these contacts, these accesses don't exist in this other, nonvirtual world. Talking like this I may sound fearless. But I'm not fearless. The thing is – some things you can choose. Others are not choices. I'm read as Black – no choice. I'm read as gay. So, I can't say: 'Oh, I won't engage in this struggle, I won't make this post, won't make this comment'. I *have* to make this comment [original emphasis].

His description is one in which dataveillance is as uncontrollable as it is hard to "understand". He suggests that the only way to avoid this "control" would be to leave Facebook, but that this is not an option. Through the platform, he has established political "contacts" and "accesses" that exist only on the platform. Without these "contacts" and "accesses", it would become harder for him to resist others' "reading" of him as of an inferior race and holding a deviant sexual orientation. These assumed prejudices, which did not originate from the platform's visibility regime, leave him with "no choice" but to "engage in this struggle" by posting and commenting.

Other participants provided similar descriptions. When asked if he tried to reduce the visibility of his posts, undergraduate law student Rafael told me:

> [8.33] Before, yes, I'd avoid talking harshly about feminism because I was hanging out with a girl who is a feminist. I knew she would get sad. But in the last months [when he got more involved in politics], I've changed. That [his Facebook profile] is my environment, and if it bothers someone, this person can 'unfollow' me.

Rafael seems to have a nuanced story of self-invisibilization. He did it once for affective reasons. However, as he became more involved in politics, he stopped doing so. It seems that his civic self-understanding, due likely to the context of the crisis, has become too important to be restricted. Unlike Octavio, Rafael – who is a White middle-class man – did not relate the need to exert critical voice uncompromisingly to fight an injustice. His account denotes a need to affirm his values such as honesty and gender conservatism, I propose.

8.4. Conclusion

This chapter addressed SRQ 3.2, which asks whether participants try to reduce their visibility on Facebook and whether/how these attempts affect their civic voice expressions. The first part of the chapter discussed descriptions of projects whose actions did not interfere with the expression of their civic voice. I described *(re)categorization of others* (Section 8.2.1) as using "Privacy Settings" functionalities to stop some individuals from seeing some posts; *space shifting* (Section 8.2.2) as moving across different locations on the platform's interface to effectuate the same kind of control; and *tactical delays* (Section 8.2.3) as timing posts to avoid their going unexpectedly viral. More frequent were depictions of projects that did involve some form of transformation of civic voice expressions. These transformations, examined in the second part of the chapter, included changes to *who* is speaking by creating *misleading profiles* (Section 8.3.1), constructions of ironic and subtle messages to conceal one's real opinions (*voice disguising,* Section 8.3.2) or literal invisibilizations of one's civic voice expressions. In some cases, interviewees described being vigilant about not expressing views that they thought could offend likeminded end users (*voice correction,* Section 8.3.3) and erasing (*voice deletion,* Section 8.3.4) or concealing (*voice suppression,* (Section 8.3.5) posts that could potentially be harmful to themselves. Others talked about *voice disappearance* (Section 8.3.6) projects, that is, when they seemingly tried to stop speaking about politics completely on Facebook. In the third and last part of the chapter, I examined two main reasons why participants reported not trying to reduce the visibility of their civic voice expressions on Facebook: that doing so is *unnecessary* (Section 8.4.1) and/or *unacceptable* (Section 8.4.2).

In Chapter 9, the empirical findings examined in this and in the previous three chapters inform my attempt to conceptualize how Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime shapes civic voice as not only a civic action but as a form of civic self-understanding. In regard to the descriptions of visibility control projects specifically examined here and in Chapter 7, Section 9.4 returns to the concept of civic voice and prefiguration to propose a more general systematization of how imaginaries of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime seem to lead interviewees to qualify (prefigure) certain kinds of civic expressions – and, ultimately, themselves – in certain ways. Or, put another way, how these imaginaries shape their process of civic becoming. This systematization (which I call *prefiguration cycle of civic voice*) allows me to cast light on the normative implications of these processes, conceptualized in Section 9.5 as *bottom-up authoritarianism*.

Chapter 9

Voice Through Silence

9.1. Introduction

Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 examined descriptions about how ordinary Brazilian citizens schematize Facebook's visibility regime (Chapter 5), the social imaginaries they hold about this regime (Chapter 6), and the ways in which these imaginaries allow them to try to control how their civic voices are heard on Facebook through projects that aimed at expanding (Chapter 7) or reducing (Chapter 8) their visibility.

Here, I revisit the empirical findings from those chapters to further develop conceptual insights to advance current discussions on datafication power and its consequences for democracy. My argument is developed in four main parts. The first three follow, roughly, the sequencing and structure of the empirical chapters. Each begins with a brief overview of the theory that guided my data collection and analysis, summarizes the empirical findings and compares them to the literature on similar topics. I formulate my conceptual insights through iteration with the conceptual framework (and other theories), to address the sub research questions. The fourth and fifth parts build on these insights to consider the analytical and normative aspects that have emerged from my research. I begin by examining the findings in Chapter 5.

9.2. The Conspicuous Invisibility of Facebook's Algorithmic Visibility Regime

My conceptual framework suggests that Facebook's datafication power is exerted through a structure that I describe as an algorithmic visibility regime, composed of a combination of the vectors of sight (the patterns in what end users see on the news feed) and readability (the patterns related to how end users are read by the platform). This structure, I proposed, is employed to try to control end users' actions toward itself by directing how they qualify (or prefigure) these actions with the aim of furthering the platform's business model. This involves, primarily, the attempt to direct how end users' make sense of the algorithmic visibility regime by materializing this regime in certain ways (see Table 3.1 in Section 3.6.2). In relation to the regime's sight vector, it could be argued that Facebook tries to materialize a *personalized* news feed so as to attract end users' attention; in the case of the readability vector, the platform apparently intends to materialize its infrastructure as *inscrutable* so as to deflect end users' attention (and possible interference) from its inner workings, its infrastructure.

In the conceptual framework (Section 3.6.3), I suggested that understanding the ways in which end users reflect on these attempted materializations is the first step to investigate how the platform's visibility regime is imagined and, thus, might shape civic voices. This refers to **SRQ 1: How do ordinary end users schematize Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime?** and was addressed in Chapter 5 ("The Schematization of Facebook's Algorithmic Visibility Regime"). The notion of schematization (Section 3.3.2) draws on the phenomenological perspective synthesized by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) which suggests that individuals construct schemas about the world by consciously and (often) socially experiencing that world. These experiences result in attention to certain *areas of reality*. Over time, individuals may identify patterns in these areas and develop certain "types", that is, simplified models of aspects of the world.

The findings examined in Chapter 5 (see Table 9.1 below and Appendix 7) suggest that the study participants seemed to describe three macro areas (composed of several micro areas) through which they developed schemas about Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime, which I labelled *responses, information,* and *probing actions*.

Macro Areas		Micro Areas
Responses	• Accurate Responses • Inaccurate Responses	• Changes in elements of news feeds • Own actions (on and off platform) • Other end users' reactions (on and off platform)
Information	• Traditional Media Information • Platform Information • Social Interaction	• News feed visual elements • Books, movies, journalistic pieces, rumours • Work, pedagogical and private interactions • Page's statistics about other end users
Probing Actions	• Improvised Survey • Improvised Algorithm Audit	• Changes in timelines • Other end users' actions (on platform) • Results of surveys executed with the aid of an external software

Table 9.1. Summary of empirical findings of Chapter 5. Source: Author.

How do these empirical findings compare to the findings in the literature on similar processes? The evidence in Chapter 5 offers some interesting answers. The way individuals described making

sense of Facebook's visibility regime through information that was not about Facebook itself (one example of the consumption of *traditional media information*) and the use of survey software by an interviewee to make sense of other end users (*improvised survey*), have not, to my knowledge, been investigated in the literature. At the same time, although they may not use the same theoretical vocabulary, several authors suggest that it is by making inferences about algorithmically curated news feeds, consuming some information and, less often, probing elements of datafied platforms, that end users tend to construct understandings about the functioning of Facebook (see Section 3.5.2). However, the conceptual framework proposed in this study allows these conjectures to be advanced by examining these findings vis-à-vis the platform's datafication power.

This study provides evidence to argue that, in designing a system whose pervasive datafication and machine learning algorithms seek to adapt to every datafied action, in order to predict what end users would like to see, Facebook does manage to materialize a highly personalized news feed. This is particularly evident in the case of observation of *responses*. Interviewees told me, multiple times, that they could see their news feeds adjusting in response to their actions – the *accurate responses* referred to in Table 9.1 and Section 5.2.2. They assumed that some of these shifts were responses to clicks on interface buttons, such as the "Block" button (e.g. Nicolas, Excerpt 5.23). More often, news feed adjustments were understood as consequences of actions that were not explicitly about visibility. Lorena's observation of the shifts she could see in her newsfeed shifting appropriately to show her more content about Rio de Janeiro's dancing scene, after she added dancers from that city as "friends" (Excerpt 5.4). Likewise, the identification of inaccurate responses seemed to emerge as contrasts to participants' expectations of accuracy – and not as ruptures to a natural, unbiased order. For instance, initially, Vigo thought that Facebook's algorithm "was about interaction", but then concluded that, commonly, it was aimed at dividing ideologically opposed users (Excerpt 5.20). For Fernanda, the "change" in the "algorithm" became perceptible due to her default assumption that profile pictures would show up in her news feed only if they were changed, that is, interacted with by users (Excerpt 5.21).

Although obliquely, the findings regarding the consumption of *information* also suggest the success of this component of Facebook's datafication power. Personalization is not an end in itself, as I pointed out in Section 3.6.2. Its goal is to lead end users to imagine that Facebook's news feed is organized by a natural logic of "relevance", which could make them qualify any action towards the news feed as "enticing". I suggest that the multiplicity and pervasiveness of the information circulating about Facebook, attests to how deeply infiltrated into interviewees' lives the platform has become –

a strong signal of how relevant Facebook appears to be understood by its end users. Multiple kinds of media content (books, news media pieces) and social interactions (affective, professional, pedagogic) were described as being about Facebook. Participants employed informational fragments, such as what an "algorithm" is (Nicolas, Excerpt 5.23), to make sense of the whole of the regime; they saw echoes of Facebook on narratives that were not about or were not directly linked to Facebook itself (Section 5.3.1); information provided by the platform's built-in analytics (Section 5.3.2); and felt the need to read, circulate and believe in rumours (Excerpts 5.32 - 5.35) and conspiracy theories about the platform (Rafael, Excerpt 5.36) in order to make sense of it. It seems reasonable to claim that, had the platform not become so relevant, there would be much less interest in understanding its functioning. Of course, the importance of Facebook is not self-evident or unidirectional. As I observed in Section 5.3.1, the fieldwork was conducted less than a year after the Brexit referendum in the UK and only a few months after the election of Donald Trump as US President. As a result, there was frantic public discussion on how the platform, supposedly, might overturn democracy. Terms, such as "algorithm", were escaping from the academic and technical realms and becoming popular "dirty words" (Reynolds, 2019). That is, experiences of information consumption, arguably, can be understood as both an outcome of the relevance of Facebook for billions of users and indicative of the importance assigned to it by other actors – politicians, journalists, researchers. Moreover, this relevance was linked to a myriad factors, such as network effects and regulation (or lack thereof), other than the nature of its main end user product (the news feed).

The reported *probing actions* further illustrate the point about relevance. Daniel's willingness to carry out an *improvised survey* of his readers to construct his own information (Excerpt 5.40) and Fabio's and Rafael's improvised *algorithm audits* (Excerpts 5.41 and 5.42, respectively) demanded a considerable amount of interest, some time and some labour. They had not only consumed information about Facebook and observed patterns of responses – they also cared enough about what was going on the platform to invent ways of testing its visibility regime, despite the possible problems associated to these tests. Fabio likely knew that posting images of nudity would lead the platform to block his account (he had faced a similar punishment in the past, he told me); in Rafael's case, there was, arguably, a social cost to exposing his apparent lack of "likes", by asking "friends" to react to his post.

It might seem banal to conclude that Facebook's news feed is materialized as personalized – an assumption that is not challenged in the literature. Nevertheless, in the light of my conceptualization of datafication power, this conclusion matters. On closer inspection, it is clear that

it is the very personalization of the news feed – and its likely consequences for assumptions about relevance – that undermine Facebook's second control technique (which intends to render its infrastructure inscrutable). Again, this is clear in the reported experiences of observing responses. The sort of constantly updated personalization engendered by the platform's algorithmic visibility regime appears to multiply the shifts in the patterns of content flowing through interviewees' news feeds. In turn, these shifts increase the number of times they may establish connections between what they see on the news feed and their own actions. As these fleeting responses proliferate, it becomes less likely that they are mere flukes, or not noticeable. When asked how they had concluded that Facebook was reading their actions before deciding what to place in their news feed, almost all the interviewees pointed to these connections. As Theo (Excerpt 5.7) said: "We can't think that everything works by chance". The plasticity of the news feed – how the forms and content that appear on it constantly change over time – serves as perceivable seams in the hidden decisions made by the platform's algorithmic infrastructure. Indeed, the more accurate the personalization, the easier it became for participants to realize that these responses could not be a "fluke". Recall Artur's idea that Facebook had tapped his smart phone to offer him a solar panel ad which left him "absurdly scared" (Excerpt 5.9.). He seems to be asking, if Facebook knows about such an intimate wish, what might it not know? That is, the platform's algorithmic visibility regime does appear to work as "'a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other", as much of the critical scholarship on datafication argues (Deleuze, 1992, p. 4, cited in Cheney-Lippold, 2011, p. 169; see also Yeung, 2017, and Zuboff, 2019, for similar arguments). However, instead of rendering its hidden mechanics imperceptible, this self-deforming cast makes them too evident to go unnoticed.

Similarly, in becoming highly relevant, but not offering an official and all-encompassing explanation about its government of visibility,[63] the platform likely incentivized (or facilitated) the consumption of conspiratorial, baseless and incomplete information about its inner workings – the origin of much of what I have termed uncontrollable visibility imaginary (to which I return in the next section). Unsurprisingly, none of the interviewees reported having schematized the regime due to information produced by Facebook itself – say, through an advertisement, message on the interface, or a press release. The silence about its regime is a fundamental part of the platform's strategy to render its inner workings inscrutable. However, in doing this, Facebook relinquishes its ability to try to define how people talk about one of its core elements, I suggest. Probing actions, again, indicate a

[63] At least, this was the case at the time of my fieldwork. Section 10.4 discusses the potential temporal limitations of my conclusions.

confluence of these unintended consequences – for instance, Fabio and Rafael had both consumed conspiratorial information about Facebook.

The foregoing analysis suggests that Facebook's datafication power exhibits an internal contradiction. On the one hand, the regime does manage to materialize the platform news feed as minutely personalized. On the other, largely because of the efficiency of this first materialization, the infrastructure of the regime becomes, *unintentionally*, imaginable, compromising Facebook's attempt to render it inscrutable. Put another way, the success of one prefiguration ordering attempt undermines the other. Nevertheless, if the algorithmic efficiency of the sight vector makes the regime imaginable, it does not render it fully comprehensible. None of the interviewees was completely sure about their own reflections and conclusions. Many participants were hesitant in their answers, which were framed by expressions such as "I think", "not sure, but…", "I don't know well", etc. Shifts in the visual flows of the news feeds, information and probes seem, largely, to fill in the void of meaning that stemmed from the gap between the certainty that there is *something* behind the interface making decisions about who becomes visible to whom, and the uncertainty about *what, exactly*, this something is.

I argue, therefore, that Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime is schematized through its materialization as *conspicuously invisible*. That is, this regime produces or gives rise to conspicuous evidence about its own existence and logics. However, this evidence does not reveal the reasons behind these mutations, deepening suspicions about what, really, is going on. Constantly thought of and discussed, the particulars of Facebook's government of visibility surfaced in my interviewees' descriptions as a public, open and largely obvious mystery, whose solution, participants seemed to assume, is unknown to almost everyone. However, conspicuous invisibility is not a feature of the platform. Rather, it is produced by interviewees' practical engagement with the platform and how this engagement leads them to reflect and communicate, publicly and privately, about Facebook. That is, this aspect is not observable on either the platform or to the end users, but in the *relations* between platform and users, as described by the latter (see also Bucher, 2017).

This insight diverges from some arguments about the epistemology of infrastructures. Despite Bucher's (2018) suggestion that datafication processes may appear to be "known unknows", critical data studies research tends to assume, in line with Starr (1999, p. 380), that computational infrastructures are "by definition invisible" and only become discoverable "on breakdown". This insight is echoed in the idea that end users find out about behind-the-screen algorithmic operations when they are surprised by what appears in their news feeds (e.g. Eslami et al., 2015; Hamilton,

Sandvig, Karahalios, & Eslami, 2014; Rader, 2017). However, as my analysis indicates, Facebook's computational infrastructure (and the regime as a whole) appears to become imaginable because it works remarkably well – sometimes *too* well. This insight echoes the work of anthropologists of non-computational infrastructures (Larkin, 2013). These scholars have demonstrated how authoritarian regimes, for instance, have used electrical grids (Sneath, 2009) and satellites (Barker, 2005) as explicit displays of power and sources of legitimacy, and that supposedly ignorant users can become "experts" in infrastructural systems (Winther, 2008). In Nigeria in the 1930s, for instance, the "sense of wonder" produced by electricity has been described as key in the construction of what Larkin (2008, p. 19) names the "colonial sublime". Yet, these theses on the explicit political usage of infrastructure do not seem to apply to conspicuous invisibility as evidenced in this study. Facebook's infrastructural elements were not exhibited intentionally as part of a top-down plan to sustain a certain order, or a product of ordinary expertise. Their liminal knowability, in theory, was unwanted, somewhat detrimental to the platform's attempts to control users' actions and not dependent on – even amateur – know-how.

More than rendering Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime knowable, conspicuous invisibility informs the contours of the social imaginaries that result from the schematizations analysed in Chapter 5 and in this section, I suggest. My conceptual framework proposed that Facebook intended to lead end users to assume the platform was a mere news feed of relevant content, thus, obscuring not only its infrastructural components but also the very idea that such an infrastructure is entangled with the interface (Section 3.6.2). This attempt seems to have backfired, but in a generative manner. Whereas the experiences through which participants imagined the regime produced some sort of assumption of control over how this regime works (at the very least, a sense that it can be controlled, even if not by interviewees themselves), the conflicting signs made available by these experiences and the lingering unknowns appeared to indicate that this control can never be fully trusted. Hence, I suggest that conspicuous invisibility allows for the co-existence of contradictory imaginaries about Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime, as explained in Chapter 6 and explored further in the next section.

In addition, the experiences allowing the regime to become imaginable involved more than simply occurrences on the platform. Participants did not describe an isolated unfolding, as if observing a black box opening at a distance. Precisely because the platform's infrastructure was visually invisibilised, its visibility regime seemed to depend on social interactions to become imaginable. In fact, all the interviewees' reported schematizations involved relationships between various elements: Facebook (e.g. "the algorithm", its "globalist" controllers), themselves, other end users, state actors

(real or not), politicians, other companies, etc. This seems to be at the origins of the sociomaterial nature of the interviewees' imaginaries of the algorithmic visibility regime, as I argue next.

9.3. Sociomaterial Imaginaries, Imagined Others

Chapter 6 ("Three Social Imaginaries of Facebook's Algorithmic Visibility Regime") addressed SRQ 2: Which social imaginaries do ordinary end users hold of the platform's algorithmic visibility regime? As was explained, all the interviewees reported actions or understandings that implied or made explicit assumptions about Facebook's government of visibility. Chapter 6 was organized around a combination of Taylor's (2004) understanding of social imaginary and the concept of algorithmic visibility regime. If interviewees are able to imagine the regime, their imaginaries could *a priori* be theorized as involving the regime's two visibility vectors, how these vectors relate to each other and the broader moral order to which assumptions about them are anchored (see Section 3.6.3).

Chapter 6 identified three imaginaries (see Table 9.2 below and Appendix 7). Working inductively with these concepts, I suggested that the first imaginary, which I labelled as *controllable visibility imaginary*, implies an end user-centred normative order: who ought to visibilize whom on Facebook is a function of end users' discretion. In the second imaginary (*predictive visibility imaginary*), end users are displaced from this centre by the data on their actions, collected by Facebook, based on which it makes automated decisions on content allocation. In the third (*uncontrollable visibility imaginary*), end users have no say about how the regime works: the exploitative reading of their actions by various kinds of actors (not just the platform) appears disconnected from the seeming political censorship that ruled the configuration of their news feed.

	Controllable Visibility	**Predictive Visibility**	**Uncontrollable Visibility**
Readability Vector	Control Tool	Eavesdropping	Exploitation
Sight Vector	Visual Boundary-Making	Automated Placement	Political Censorship
Vectors Entanglement	Compliance	Wish Prediction	No Entanglement
Normative Order	End Users-Centred	Data-Centred	End User-Excluding

Table 9.2. Summary of empirical findings of Chapter 6. Source: Author.

These findings depart, in some ways, from those in the research on lay understandings of platforms' datafication operations. Conceptualizations of ordinary users' "theories", "notions" and "imaginaries" of platforms' algorithmic systems do not usually focus on broader issues of power and control or on visibility *per se*, as in this study. Their emphasis tends to be on ideas "about what

algorithms are, what *they* should be, how *they* function and what *these* imaginations in turn make possible [emphases added]" (Bucher, 2017, p. 40; see Section 3.5.2). Works that do consider other imagined elements, such as "audience", tend to pay less attention to the role of datafication operations (e.g. Duffy and Chan, 2018). However, as demonstrated in Chapter 6, the interviewees did not appear to emphasize either "algorithms" or "audiences". Perhaps, expectedly, given my interest in patterns of interactions (i.e. a regime), I was able to identify how they seemed to imagine multiple artefacts and human actors as engaged in *relationships*.

Returning to Table 9.2, in the *controllable visibility imaginary*, the readability vector seemed to be conceived of as a *control tool,* not because of any intrinsic characteristic of "the algorithm", the term used, for example, by Joaquim (Excerpt 6.1), but because end users like Joaquim decided to use this imagined artefact, in this way. Similarly, its sight vector might be understood as a form of *visual boundary-making,* since end users such as Gael (Excerpt 6.4). felt the need to construct such boundaries: they do not emerge necessarily or by themselves, Logically, the first vector *complies* with the second due to the interviewees' willingness to instantiate this entanglement in the first place. Imaginations about the digital artefacts used by Facebook to govern visibility would make no sense without imaginations about the interviewees' themselves (their intentions, emotions, expectations), others (and what they can do in relation to interviewees) and, more distantly, some form of implicit assumption that Facebook wanted to design such a controllable regime.

In the *predictive visibility imaginary*, assumptions about the platform as a company, seem to be crucial. If the various artefacts that compose the readability and sight vectors are understood as forms of *eavesdropping* and *automated placement*, whose entanglement is aimed at *predicting* end users' wishes, this is because Facebook is imagined as a company, willing to profit out of its end users' desire to see more of the same – maybe to make them "addicted", as Fernanda told me (Excerpt 6.18). Second, this imaginary depends on the presumption that the interviewees or other users are somehow susceptible to these imagined operations, acting not only within and outside of Facebook but also generally wanting to see more of the same.

In the third imaginary, *uncontrollable visibility*, there is a greater fragmentation of actors – without which, however, imagined visibility vectors make little sense. That the readability vector can be assumed to be a form of *exploitation* is because the interviewees assumed that there are organizations (states, companies) and other end users who might want to exploit Facebook's data, or the loopholes in its built-in tools of visibility control. This is captured in Laura's excerpt (6.21) on

companies which "have an intelligence system" to monitor users on Facebook, and on "someone who knows someone" and might want to leak, copy or communicate a post whose visibility appeared restricted by "Privacy Settings". Likewise, the idea that the sight vector works as *political censorship,* seems to hinge on ideological presumptions of, for example, Facebook as a "globalist" company (Luis in Excerpt 6.25), and almost certainly involved in conspiracies with politicians (Telma, Excerpt 6.28; Fabricio, Excerpt 6.26).

These insights suggest an extension to my initial conceptual framework (Section 3.6). The framework assumed the idea that the symbolic/human and the material/non-human are interwoven (Taylor, 2004; Sewell, 1992), a kind of co-constitutive duality that is reflected in my analysis. As I explored in the previous section, interviewees' concrete experiences did seem to constitute imaginaries; and, as I show in the next section, imaginaries do seem to constitute certain concrete actions toward non-human resources. However, these three imaginaries seem, also, to point to a different kind of co-constitution. For, standing between the inferences to generate schemas from concrete experiences and the actualization of these schemas into actions, there appears to be an *internal* generativity to the social imaginaries of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime. That is, these imaginaries are *themselves* composed of imaginations of human and non-human elements and these imaginations seem to shape one another in non-linear ways. In trying to make sense of interviewees' descriptions, I found it nearly impossible to find explicit or implicit articulations of Facebook's interface functionalities, algorithms and software which were not entangled with the imaginations of the interviewees, other end users, Facebook's controllers, other platforms and companies, politicians, broader ideologies, economic interests, etc. Participants' assumptions about these digital artefacts' material mechanisms and attributes seemed deeply infused with affective, political and economic meanings.

This ontology might best be defined as *sociomaterial*.[64] In my conceptual framework, I did not anticipate the kind of entanglement between imaginations of human and of non-human elements. On the basis of my analysis it now seems appropriate to extend my conceptual framework by incorporating insights from the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS). The concept of sociomateriality has been used by a variety of STS scholars to describe the "constitutive entanglement" of human and non-human entities during social practices. While there are multiple formulations (for a discussion, see Leonardi, 2012), I follow Orlikowski (2007). She describes

[64] Sewell's (1992) theory accounts for the constitutive relationship between artefacts and schemas. However, it does not emphasize the inseparability of these two dimensions, which are clear in my interviewees' explicit and implicit descriptions of what goes on in Facebook.

sociomateriality as entailing that "any distinction of humans and artifacts… is analytical only; these entities relationally entail or enact each other in practice" (Orlikowski, 2007, p. 1438). This formulation resonates with the discussion in Chapter 6.[65] Surely, interviewees do not exhibit quasi-theoretical ideas about how non-human and human actors are not "independently existing entities with inherent characteristics" (Orlikowski, 2007, p. 1438). However, couched in ordinary terms, their descriptions seemed to depend on implicit understandings, according to which what goes on in Facebook is the result of a form of "constitutive entanglement" between multiple imagined elements. There are not just an "algorithm", "Facebook", a physical database, other users, etc., but rather an indefinite number of relations between *imagined* artefacts and *imagined* human actors (individuals, groups, organizations) which seem to depend on each other to be imagined in the way they are. Since I refer here to relations between imaginaries and not to the "real" entities with which these imaginaries are associated (as proponents of sociomateriality usually do), my adoption of the term is heterodox. On the basis of my research, it is not possible to suggest that any imaginary of any technology can or should be defined as sociomaterial. Likewise, I do not argue that all social imaginaries are sociomaterial. However, my findings do provide a basis for proposing that algorithmic systems and, in particular, machine learning systems, seem prone to elicit this kind imaginary. Given their inherent role as connectors of various kinds of inputs, and their computational capacity to produce outputs that might be highly consequential, but are not easily explainable to ordinary people (Burrell, 2016), these systems invite the application of various frames of meaning which are not necessarily those understood as typical of "technology".

In sum, to say that interviewees appeared to hold not social imaginaries, as proposed in the conceptual framework and in Chapter 6, but sociomaterial imaginaries entails arguing that they encompass two forms of constitutive relationships between human and non-human elements. One (already alluded to by, for example, Sewell and Taylor) comprises the dynamic relationship between imaginaries and individuals' concrete experiences. Another may be said to regard the way individuals combine imaginations of both people (their selves, collectivities, ideas) and things (their forms, functions) to create the mental constructs that tend to structure their everyday practices – at least, in regard to Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime.

This reconceptualization has important consequences for this study. From a sociomaterial perspective, it is not only imaginations about human elements that shaped interviewee's assumptions

[65] This is not to say that these imagined elements do not exist as real independent entities, which, of course, is the general point of sociomateriality. My point is that their *imaginations* can be understood as being engaged in a relationship of co-constitution.

about Facebook datafication operations, as Chapter 6 and this section (thus far) emphasize. The opposite seems also to be true: interviewees assumptions of human elements were partially constituted by their imaginations about Facebook's visibility regime.

This becomes clear when we consider how *others* appeared in my interviews. During my fieldwork, I heard numerous descriptions about imagined individuals, groups, organizations, and how they would react to an interviewee's civic voice expressions – a critical factor in the prefiguration of such expressions, as discussed in the next section. These representations are akin to the notion of "imagined audience", referred to in Section 3.5.2 but which was not originally part of my conceptual framework. It has been argued that "imagined audiences" are concocted through end users' attempts symbolically to recreate their communication boundaries in view of the understanding that online spaces like Facebook collapse communicational contexts (e.g. Marwick & boyd, 2011). Typical of studies on the relations between "self-presentations" and interface functionalities (Marwick & boyd, 2014), this concept does not appear to have been reconsidered vis-à-vis recent developments of datafication, despite authors noting the need to do so (Litt, 2016, p. 112).

My findings might offer an interesting entry point to addressing this lacuna by allowing for the development of the concept of *imagined other*, as formulated below. The evidence examined in Chapters 7 and 8 (and see next section of this chapter) indicates that imagined others fall in this study into three categories:

(a) *Controllable Others*. On many occasions, the interviewees seemed to believe that, through the platform's functionalities, they could expose themselves to/ conceal themselves from some social actors regardless of whether these actors wanted to visibilize them or not. In Antonio's narrative, these are potential clients who might not be happy to see that he is a *Bolsonarista* (Excerpt 8.2); in Fabricio's (Excerpt 7.6), they appear as likeminded conservatives who must be informed about his "events"; in Artur's, they are "addable" conservative strangers who must be convinced of his progressive ideas (Excerpt 7.3). These imagined others might be called *controllable others*. As indicated by these examples, different controllable others might be conceived as controllable in contrasting ways and on different levels. In most of my interviews, these *others* were associated to the controllable visibility imaginary. However, in at least one case (Fabricio, Excerpt 7.6) they became imaginable due to the uncontrollable visibility imaginary.

(b) *Imagined Bubble*. Participants also often described a second kind of *other*: those who likely would see their actions on Facebook because they had previously interacted with them– the "bubble" that many participants referred to. In their descriptions, the definition of *who* is inside the "bubble" appears as subject to their own willing interactions with the interface functionalities (consistent with the controllable visibility imaginary) or by the automated decisions assumed to occur under the predictive visibility imaginary (executed by "the algorithm" or any cognate term such as "filter"). But this general form hardly describes the bubble's content: different participants imagined radically different bubbles. Some are assumed to be ideologically pure (Artur's, Excerpt 8.14); others see them as ideologically mixed, containing both friends and conservative "clients" or defined not by their ideology, but by how they repel complexity and nuance (Daniel's, Excerpt 7.18). That is, people's imagined bubbles may be but need not be as homogenous as suggested by the "filter bubble" metaphor. Their assumed homogeneity is related less to the political inclinations of the components of a "bubble" than to an assumed stable (but not fixed) visibility pattern.

(c) *Imagined Surveillant*. End users within an imagined bubble often are understood as secret watchers of one's actions. However, their gaze, while often influencing the interviewee's actions, is avoidable – they are not "surveillants" according to my understanding the term. By *imagined surveillant* I mean, first, those end users or categories of end users who, despite being outside one's imagined bubble and regardless of one's wishes, can see and/or read one's civic voice. Thanks to the uncontrollable visibility imaginary, participants seemed to assume that multiple actors outside their bubble could, by and large, see or read them. Yet, my interviewees rarely talked about a generic surveillant. Their descriptions about how to navigate the assumption of uncontrollability invariably invoked "others" who, even when not concrete individuals and groups (like Patricia's work colleagues, Excerpt 8.12), were *somehow* specific ("the police", in Lorena's description, Excerpt 8.30) or Facebook itself (according to almost all the interviewees).

These insights seem well-aligned to those in the literature on imagined audiences. Litt and Hargittai (2016, p. 6), for instance, also found that these imaginations are multiple, originating from various kinds of ties, including those stemming from "imagined surveillance" (Duffy & Chan, 2018). As in Eden Litt's (2016) work (perhaps the most complete exploration of the notion of imagined audience), in my study participants described that certain posts led them to imagine certain others. For example, a post about police violence invoked the possibility that police officers would will see

the message (e.g. Miguel, Excerpt 8.19). Also, similar to Litt (2016), I argue that the kind of imagined other may be fluid: the same social actor might be, in distinct situations, "controllable" and an element of an "imagined bubble" (as many other end users seem to be assumed by participants to be).

Despite these general similarities, the concept of imagined others differs from that of imagined audience in three ways. As my generic language suggests, imagined other encompasses a much broader array of social actors and relations. The literature on imagined audiences typically refers, explicitly or implicitly, to *end users* who might see – and potentially respond to – their messages. The idea of "audience" might apply to components of "imagined bubbles" – since it implies the understanding of a performance that is knowingly undertaken for the consumption of others (Litt, 2012). It is, however, difficult to see how "controllable others" and "imagined surveillants" would fit this characterization. The former seems to be imagined as individuals whose very position as potential "audience" is defined by the interviewees themselves – and, it is in this capacity that these others were invoked during the interviews. The latter refers to social actors who, in addition to monitoring performances, regardless of interviewees' intentions, rarely see such performances – they usually dataveil them. That is, relationships with imagined others appear, commonly, to be conceived as involving a one-way connection or communication.

There appears, also, to be a distinct relationship between the functioning of the platform and imaginations about social actors. Litt (2016) proposes that different "features" (feedback mechanisms, kinds of privacy settings) might differently inform the construction of imagined audiences. In investigations of imagined audiences, the central feature is arguably *the lack* of a clear rule defining who can visibilize whom, which engenders the collapse of contexts and the need to imagine an audience. In contrast, I suggest that imagined others hinge on the existence of understandings of rules underlying Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime. These rules seemed to be assumed as enacting relationships and, hence, the production of relative positions in the assumed diagram of the algorithmic visibility regime, as described by Brighenti (2010; see Section 3.6). Put another way, these assumed rules partially re-construct participants' contexts of communication. Under the presumption that the regime is a function of interviewees' wishes (typical of the controllable visibility imaginary), these rules seemed to allow the interviewees to unilaterally create boundaries and interactions (controllable others). These boundaries, merged with those automatically created by Facebook (according to the predictive visibility imaginary), give rise to imagined bubbles. In the case of the uncontrollable visibility imaginaries, and surveillant others, this reconstruction is more nuanced. It is not that the interviewees had no idea about what caused them to be susceptible to be seen or read

by virtually any social actor on Facebook, but that these rules were not organized under a broader logic of visibility government as in the other two imaginaries. For example, if governments and companies are assumed to be able to pull end users' data from Facebook this is because such data are deemed to be produced and stored in a particular way; screenshots can be captured by anyone, but are not a random occurrence – assumptions about their usage are made possible by ideas regarding how images can be produced through digital technologies. It is not that contexts simply collapse – they collapse for different reasons which obey particular logics.

However, such assumptions about how Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime functions do not necessarily define *who* these others are. Based on my study, it is possible to suggest that the particular imagined others described by my interviewees either are or echo real-life actors, about whom participants hold expectations of a normative order. These others were described as believing that some civic voice expressions are ethically unacceptable or compulsory, conventional or abnormal, dangerous or safe. Usually, it is their anticipated reaction (or recognition or misrecognition) that inform interviewees' decisions on how to control the visibility of their voices. Therefore, if sociomaterial imaginaries are kinds of "deep schemas", imagined others might be theorized as embodying "surface" schemas, in Sewell's (1992; see Section 3.3.1) sense of rules that immediately inform everyday practices.

A third difference, largely implied in the discussion above, is that imagined others, as defined here, are conjured in the context of relations of power – an aspect that is usually explicitly theorized in the literature on imagined audiences. By this I mean that these imaginations are, on the one hand, offshoots of the dynamics engendered by Facebook's datafication power. On the other, inequalities that have little to do with datafication also play a constitutive role in their constitution – a point that is unpacked in Section 9.4.2 below, when I discuss the importance of interviewees' social contexts for the enactment of these imagined others.

The phenomena and the concepts discussed in this section may play a role in the structuring of various kinds of Facebook practices. Publishing a family picture, a post about sports, a comment offering emotional support – it seems reasonable to claim that these other kinds of Facebook practices probably involve sociomaterial imaginaries and imagined others, as developed above. In other words, while *necessary to* civic voice expression, the conceptual insights developed so far in this chapter are not necessarily *about* civic voices. They retain some analytic independence from the kinds of practices that are the main focus in this thesis. (I return to this point when considering the contributions made

by this study – Section 10.3.) However, I suggest that, when instantiated to orient people's civic voices expressions, sociomaterial imaginaries merge with another kind of imaginary that is particular to civic voices – civic imaginaries (Section 3.6.1). This point, crucial to my argument about *bottom-up authoritarianism*, is developed after a re-examination, in the next section, of my findings about the visibility control projects of civic voice expressions.

9.4. The Prefiguration Cycle of Civic Voice

Let me recap my argument in this chapter so far. The first part contended that, in successfully materializing a personalized and enticing news feed, Facebook's prefiguration ordering attempts render its algorithmic visibility regime conspicuously invisible. In the second part, I argued that the schematization processes that originate in this materialization are what permits the development of sociomaterial imaginaries and imagined others. Building on these insights, I next consider in which ways sociomaterial imaginaries of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime seem to order the prefiguration of interviewees' civic expressions, prompting experiences of (mis)recognition and constituting their civic self-understanding. That is to say, this section examines the role of these imaginaries (and, indirectly, of Facebook's visibility regime datafication operations) in the peculiar processes of civic becoming the thesis set out to understand.

Chapters 7 (*Visibility Expansion Projects*) and 8 (*Visibility Reduction Projects*) considered whether and how interviewees' attempts to control the visibility of their civic voice expressions transformed how they expressed themselves as citizens. As proposed in the conceptual framework, end users may try to become *more* visible to increase the possibility of their voice being heard (which I describe as *visibility expansion projects*), a possibility explored in Chapter 7, which addresses **SRQ 3.1: Do ordinary end users' attempt to expand the visibility of their civic voice expressions on Facebook? If so, is this attempt associated with how they articulate these expressions?** They may try, also, to *reduce* their visibility to avoid experiencing misrecognitions (*visibility reduction projects*), which I explored in Chapter 8 by addressing **SRQ 3.2: Do ordinary end users' attempt to reduce the visibility of their civic voice expressions on Facebook? If so, is this attempt associated with how they articulate these expressions?** Given their similar conceptual and methodological bases, the findings in Chapters 7 and 8 fall in three parallel directions: (1) projects that did not involve adjustments to civic voice; (2) projects that did involve adjustments to civic voice; and (3) the rejection of these projects (see Table 9.3 below and Appendix 7).

The empirical findings in these two chapters are both familiar and new. How end users try to increase or decrease their visibility in online participatory spaces has been documented, discussed and theorized in-depth (Section 3.5.2). It is not a new observation that individuals will use interface functionalities to define their readers (which I call *(re)categorization of others*) or to change some details in their profiles (*misleading profiles*) and online communications (*voice disguising*). Whereas my analysis reveals multiple facets of what is usually subsumed under the umbrella term "self-censorship" (see Section 3.5.2) (*correction, deletion, suppression and disappearance*), it also finds, generally, that end users do refrain from expressing their voices, which is in line with most of the empirical literature. Projects aimed at visibility expansion, on the other hand, have been much less studied. It might be said that *tactical aggression* (according to which hateful and belligerent speech may be used to achieve more interactions and, thus, visibility), *temporal control* (the practice of posting at certain moments in the expectation that more people will be online and, thus, able to read the post), and *simplification* (how users abridge their voice so as to be seen by a larger amount of people) have been examined, under different names and from different theoretical angles, in the context of far-right activists (Marwick and Lewis, 2018) and communities of professional "influencers" (Coettler, 2019; Bishop, 2019). However, unlike my research, these ideas have not been developed based on the study of ordinary people.

	Control of non-Civic voice elements	Control of civic voice elements	Reasons for no project
Visibility expansion projects (Chapter 7)	Piggybacking Network Expansion Voice Multiplication Tactical Self-Interactions Temporal Control	Tactical Aggressions Simplification Visual Provocations News Association	Useless Unethical Dangerous
Visibility reduction projects (Chapter 8)	(Re)categorization of Others Space Shifts Tactical Delays	Misleading Profiles Voice Disguising Voice Correction Voice Deletion Voice Suppression Voice Disappearance	Unnecessary Unacceptable

Table 9.3. Summary of empirical findings of Chapters 7 and 8. Source: Author.

I suggest that my formulations of civic voice (Section 3.6.1), agency as project (Section 3.3.2) and power as the ordering of prefiguration (Section 3.3.3) allow for an interesting re-interpretation of the empirical findings summarized in Table 9.3 above. Imaginaries of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime seem to influence the prefiguration of civic voice expressions in ways that are more complex than Facebook arguably expects (see Table 3.1). Instead of leading end users to think of all actions toward the platform's interface (and in particular the news feed) as "enticing", and of those toward the platform's infrastructure as "impossible", this study found that these imaginaries are associated with multiple prefigurations, occurring at interrelated moments. They seem to compose a kind of cycle, wherein the division between interface and infrastructure (and, thus, sight and readability vectors) is often blurred. Certainly, most interviewees did not describe this cycle in full. I use Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) work to piece together an abstract model from my participants' dispersed, but collectively coherent accounts, as explained in the succeeding sections.

9.4.1. The Problematization of Civic Voice Expressions

The interviewees' descriptions suggest that they prefigure civic voice expressions on Facebook as *problematic*. None of the interviewees used this term or explained specifically to what extent talking about politics on Facebook is or not "problematic". However, the very fact that all the interviewees described constructing at least one form of visibility control project, suggests that they often realize that the platform "is in some degree resistant" to the "immediate and effortless realization" of whichever civic self-representation they wanted to realize (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 998). This is not because these expressions were necessarily troubling, but because they would be vocalized under assumed uncertain visibility conditions. This is precisely the starting point of the three sociomaterial imaginaries. Even in the controllable visibility imaginary, my interviewees seem to take for granted that whether one's civic voice expression will be seen/read is not a given. This initial "problematization" seemed to elicit reflexivity, thus, informing the very need to consider whether and how to control the visibility of their civic voice expressions.

Problematization did not mean that the participants necessarily conceived visibility control projects, nor did it define which projects would be enacted. These decisions were preceded, first, by a specification of the problem – its "characterization" (Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p. 998). More than a general sense of visibility uncertainty generated by all sociomaterial imaginaries, it involved interviewees' *imagined others*. That is to say, when planning whether and how to represent themselves politically on the platform, interviewees anticipated *who* would be exposed to such self-representations, and *how* this imagined figure would react..

9.4.2. Deliberation on the Importance/Potential Damage of a Civic Voice Expression

The "characterization" of which imagined other might visibilize their civic voice expression does not, in itself, amount to a prefiguration moment. However, in embodying normative understandings about what can/cannot, ought/ought not be done and said, imagined others appeared to engender a second moment in the prefiguration cycle. At this moment, the initially problematic civic voice expression was further prefigured in relation to two relational qualifications, both of which, I suggest, hinge on expectations of civic recognition and misrecognition. These prefigurations involved definition of the importance for participants' civic self-understanding of having certain expressions articulated so as, possibly, to be heard by certain imagined others; and how such expression, potentially, can be *damaging* for their self-understanding, given the risk that, once articulated, certain others can denigrate their voices. Following Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p. 998-999), this second prefiguration is likely to encompass *deliberation* on the relative weight of these qualifications. In contrast to rationalist perspectives, what seemed to be at play was not self-interested, objective and detailed calculation of costs and benefits, but subjective and likely fleeting considerations of their own civic self-understanding, permeable to both pondered reasoning and abrupt and ambiguous feelings of what is right, perilous, expected, gratifying, etc.

Precisely why participants imagined that particular imagined others would react in any particular manner to a particular voice expression, which, thus, led them to qualify a civic voice expression as more or less important/damaging, remains largely unclear. However, in addition to immediate factors (e.g. the nature of the message, its timing, default "Privacy Settings"), the constitution of and expectations regarding imagined others do seem to be influenced by an unequally distributed sense of precarity, marked, largely, by Brazil's troubled democratic history and the contingencies of the tumultuous moment when the fieldwork was conducted (see Sections 2.2 and 2.3). In almost all the interviews, participants reported and commented on a bellicose political climate, in which friends, work colleagues, family and strangers alike, were imagined as thirsty for action in relation to even minor political disputes, with hatred and vengefulness, or, alternatively, as pardoning misconduct by ideological allies. Examples include Patricia's imagined surveillants (her boss and colleagues), who were conceived by her as politically conservative and aggressive, which implies that she ought to avoid expressing her progressive civic voice (Excerpt 8.12); Artur's imagined bubble was thought by him to be intolerant to all expressions that were not purely progressive, meaning that he ought to avoid all actions that eventually could be understood as "sexist", for instance (Excerpt 8.14); Daniel assumed that his bubble rejected complexity and, thus, ought to be served with "black or

white" content (Excerpt 7.18). The growing influence of far-right beliefs could be felt, also, as many conservative interviewees seemed to believe that Facebook's content moderation is, in fact, a piece of a "communist" global conspiracy, as Luis (Excerpt 6.25) told me, or is designed to spread rumours about its alleged leftist manipulation (Excerpts 5.32 - 5-35). The economic crisis – which, at the time of the fieldwork, was in one of its worst moments – likely increased this sense of civic vulnerability. Most interviewees told me that they feared that their civic voice might lead to harm caused by work colleagues, as exemplified by the description of the real estate agent Antonio (Excerpt 8.2).

Other factors influencing participants' sense of fragility appeared to originate from the insecurity of social minorities. Many interviewees imagined that the police could see their posts, but only those who were Black and/or from the violent outskirts of São Paulo told me that they feared being killed or harmed by the police because of their Facebook posts and comments (e.g. Benjamin, Excerpt 8.4, and Miguel, Excerpt 8.19). Gender inequalities seemed, also, to play a role in how participants understood the risks involved in representing themselves as citizens on Facebook. The only interviewees who reported suffering sustained harassment and abuse or having their images violated by "haters", were either women (e.g. Maria, Excerpt 8.9., Fernanda, Excerpt 8.5, Telma, Excerpt 8.16) or transgender (Humberto, Excerpt 8.26). My point is not about numerical prevalence, but the alleged reasons behind the denigrations of their voices. Maria and Fernanda received rape threats; Telma's post that led to her abuse was about feminism; Humberto was persecuted explicitly because of his gender. Lastly, some participants linked their will to engage in ethically contestable visibility control projects to their class and race. As Fabricio (Excerpt 8.14) told me, proudly, his conservative friends "won't believe" that a telemarketer living in a shantytown is "leading the movement"; Joaquim (Excerpt 7.17) said that being seen on Facebook could "open doors" that would otherwise be closed to a Black man from a poor neighbourhood. I do not claim that there is a linear or mandatory relationship between these contextual assumptions and the prefiguration of their civic voice expressions. Even within my sample of interviewees this was not the case. However, at least in the instances in which this connection was explicit, they seem to help to explain why people who shared the same three imaginaries of the platform's visibility regime acted upon these imaginaries differently.

Once participants decided about the relative worth of an intended civic voice expression in relation to (an) imagined other(s), the first question to consider was whether to control the visibility of their voice on Facebook completely. While all they described conceiving and enacting at least one kind of visibility control project, most reported doing so only on specific occasions: for example, in

Helena's words (Excerpt 7.15), if they wanted an urgent public issue "to go viral", or if they feared retaliations that they could not cope with, as Fabio's deletion of a post about his wife's boss implies (Excerpt 8.15). Likewise, interviewees' decisions not to control their visibility appeared, also, to originate from whether they qualified their voices as too important (see Sections 7.4.2 and 8.4.2) or too irrelevant (see Sections 7.4.1 and 8.4.1), and the consequences of becoming too visible as unacceptably damaging (see Section 7.4.3).

9.4.3. Project Conception

If participants did make the "decision" to try to control the visibility of a civic voice expression (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 999), I suggest that they were entering a third stage of the prefiguration cycle: project conception. A necessary and initial definition involved the goal of such visibility project, what Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p. 989) call "anticipatory identification". Projects that aimed at expanding interviewees' visibility appeared to assume that some civic voice expressions were too important to be invisibilised to certain imagined others. Visibility reduction projects, in contrast, arguably assumed that certain civic voice expressions, or elements of them, were too potentially damaging to be visibilized by certain imagined others.

After defining the general objective of the project, it can be suggested that they inserted "themselves into a variety of possible trajectories and spin out alternative means-ends sequences" ("symbolic resolutions") so as to construct a "hypothetical resolution", that is, decide on which actions are needed to achieve that goal (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, pp. 989-990). At this stage, it could be argued that Facebook's imagined visibility rules oriented my interviewees to understand not only *with whom* they were interacting but *how to interact* with these imagined others. As emphasized in Chapters 7 and 8, there appear to be two macro kinds of projects to control the visibility of civic voice expressions: those supported by elements extrinsic to civic voice and those realized through modification of civic voice expressions. Their different nature, I suggest, gives rise to distinct prefigurations of these expressions.

I begin by discussing those supported by non-civic voice elements, usually underpinned by the controllable visibility imaginary: (*(Re)categorization of others, space shifts*, and *tactical delays* (see Table 9.3 and Section 8.3). It is possible, in these cases, to talk about an enabling prefiguration: these projects seemed to lead the interviewees to qualify certain civic voice expressions as *possible*. Take the example of Olivia, who, by piggybacking on the reach of someone else's Facebook page, could communicate to millions of end users the social dimension of the Zika virus epidemic – something that

would have been impossible using only her personal profile (Excerpt 8.1). Importantly, these projects did not prevent civic voice expressions from being shaped by Facebook's visibility regime. Just the opposite, I suggest: their enabling role played a primary role in the constitution of participants' civic self-representations.

However, the importance of this kind of project is relative. Even those who reported employing it appeared, also, to transform their own civic voice to govern their visibility. This other macro kind of visibility control project has a distinct nature and appears to engender a different sort of prefiguration. Underpinned by the predictive and the uncontrollable visibility imaginaries, its starting point seems to be that, if Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime is moved by social life itself, it is social life that must be moulded to control the functioning of the regime. Thus, most of the visibility control projects examined in chapters 7 and 8 did not address one or another visibility vector of the visibility regime. In trying to be more/less *seen*, interviewees commonly understood that it was necessary to change how they were *read*, and vice versa. Civic voice expressions become overdetermined by distinct goals: controlling their own visibility and representing interviewees' as citizens. The resolution to this problem seemed to involve the qualification of two kinds of civic voice expressions as *necessary*:

(a) *Controlling oneself to control the others to control the regime*. In the projects I labelled *tactical aggressions, simplification, visual provocations*, and *news association* (Section 7.3; see Table 9.3.), participants seemed to control their actions of civic self-representation so as to elicit (or preclude) datafied reactions, with the goal of controlling Facebook's algorithmic decision-making and increasing the likelihood of being heard. The predictive visibility imaginary not only helped to orient participants' definition of who could see their actions (the imagined bubble I defined above) but also provided guidance about how they should relate to these others. If they wanted their voice to go beyond such a bubble, the articulation of their civic voice had to be such that would lead the components of the bubble to interact with participants' actions – through "likes", "shares", "comments", "views". In this kind of project, participants appear to be reproducing Facebook's datafication power logic: any sort of action that could be qualified as enticing by other end users, was qualified as *enticing* by them as well.

(b) *Controlling oneself to control the regime to control others.* In the projects labelled as *misleading profiles, voice disguising, voice correction, voice deletion, voice suppression* and *voice disappearance* (Section 8.3; see Table 9.3.), participants seemed to control their civic

voice expressions so as to control dataveillance operations (even if not explicitly described as such) and to prevent others from denigrating them. This sort of project, typically, was structured by the uncontrollable visibility imaginary which oriented participants to both construct imagined others (surveillants) and showed how to interact with these others. The assumption here seemed to be that, since everything that occurred within (and eventually outside) the platform would be read/seen, the only sure way to prevent imagined surveillants from being able to read/see their actions was not acting at all, not producing any data (or deleting previous actions). This kind of project could be understood as an attempt to blind the algorithmic visibility regime. In some cases, the "others" that my interviewees imagined as able to read their messages were, in fact, people within their imagined bubble (e.g. Adão, Excerpt 8.23). In these cases, the predictive and the uncontrollable imaginaries were combined: the former orients the construction of others; the latter, shows how to interact with these others. However, this combination did not alter the general contours of this second kind of project. In contrast to the first, this seemed to configure a sort of formal resistance to Facebook's prefiguration ordering: any sort of action or component of an action, that might elicit interactions from other end users was qualified as *undesirable*.

In my research, these visibility control projects were executed – or were intentionally *not* executed (e.g. Joaquim's refusal to continue to use tactical aggression, Excerpt 7.17). Even a "judicious execution" of a project may entail "loss, as when the fulfilment of a duty or realization of a particular vision of the good requires the sacrifice of an equally compelling duty or good" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 1000). Indeed, interviewees seemed to realize that, despite their (sometimes meticulous) projects, they rarely could make themselves heard as the citizens they understood themselves to be or wished to become, as I propose in the next section.

9.4.4. Self-Evaluation

The first three stages – "problematization", "deliberation" and "conception" – involve prefigurations of concrete civic voice expressions. However, during the interviews, participants, at some point, would tell me or suggest how they qualify their civic voice in more abstract terms, as if referring not to a specific action, but to an action that was typical of themselves. In these moments, I suggest, qualification of actions becomes, metonymically, a form of broad qualification of their own civic voice on Facebook. This fourth stage might be called "self-evaluation" – an element that Emirbayer and Mische do not theorize about since they are not interested in processes of self-formation. These understandings apparently emerged cumulatively. In expressing their civic voice (or

pondering the consequences of these expressions), interviewees experienced (or anticipated) recognitions and misrecognitions, which, in turn, led them to reconsider their voices on the platform. The self-evaluations that emerged during my analysis can be grouped into distinct kinds:

Inadequate. Some interviewees reported that, on Facebook, their civic voices appear *inadequate*, that is, hopelessly unable to bring about the form of civic recognition they desired to achieve. Interviewees' conclusions originate from the three different forms of misrecognition: invisibilization, denigration and distortion (Section 3.4.2). Pedro's description (Excerpt 7.27) illustrates a form of invisibilization. As he said, he does not know how to make his voice "really trespass", that is, cross the divide ("the bubble") imposed by "the algorithm" between him and the conservative individuals he expected to "change". Theo, in turn, rejected the idea of distorting his voice so as to be seen on Facebook by more people (Excerpt 7.29). This helped him to understand why his posts were rarely interacted with, making him the "wrong person" to be asked about visibility expansion. Another example is Humberto (Excerpt 8.26), the copywriter who made his gender transition on Facebook, but then was harassed and blocked (i.e. denigrated) by "haters" and the platform's image recognition algorithms. As he said multiple times in our conversation "the networks are a hostile place" for him, suggesting that people like him, who do not conform to gender binaries are worthless on the platform. In qualifying their voices as inadequate, these participants began to see the very idea of civic self-representation as uninviting – hence, their reported increasing disinterest in talking about politics on Facebook. If they wanted to preserve their self-respect, self-silencing seemed necessary.

Expendable*.* Most participants suggested that, by acting to control their visibility, they managed, eventually, to be heard on Facebook. However, this recognition entailed accepting that at least some elements of their or others' civic voices needed to be misrecognized – that is, were *expendable*. Regarding visibility reduction projects, this prefiguration was commonly described as an almost inescapable invisibilization. Recall Ava (Excerpt 8.22), for instance, who reported having no choice except to supress his "very basic" ideas about rape to avoid death threats. This sense of inescapability may also affect those who try to increase their visibility through the denigration of others' voices, like Helena (Excerpt 7.15), who used tactical hate speech to promote her conservative agenda. Other projects seem to engender the *potential* distortion of their own civic voice. What I call *simplification* projects, are one example: Benjamin, who forced himself to write short texts – despite his will to post long, serious posts (*textão*) (Excerpt 7.21). While simplification and other similar visibility expansion projects (*visual provocations* and *tactical self-Interactions*) do not necessarily lead to distortions, they might depend on the assumption that other end users can be manipulated and

misled (i.e. denigrated). Luis's (Excerpt 7.2) description about how he tried to convince readers of a radical idea "without looking like it's radical" illustrates my point. Finally, there are projects that carry the potential to either invisibilise their creators (e.g. Antonio, Excerpt 8.2, who by talking in closed groups might have missed out on the possibility of having his voice properly heard by a wider readership) or unintentionally led to the denigration of their voices (e.g. Olivia, Excerpt 7.1, who managed to be heard by a wide readership, but ended up suffering attacks from "haters"). In promoting some recognition, civic voice expressions that hinge on these sorts of compromises seemed to leave most of participants in an ambivalent position: willing to keep talking about politics on Facebook, but suspicious of whether these expressions are worthwhile (Olivia, Excerpt 7.2). In other situations, the realization that the compromise was far too costly, led the interviewees to, for example, try to become a "more responsible" citizen (Joaquim, Excerpt 7.17) and schedule moments of full disconnection (Amanda, Excerpt 8.27).

Rewarding. In a few cases, the adjusted civic voice expressions were described as truly conducive to civic recognition – that is, as *rewarding* to participants civic self-understandings. A case in point is Fabricio, who described both the usage of fake profiles (Excerpt 7.7) and tactical aggressions (7.14). Fake profiles, he said, were essential to the establishment of his self-esteem. He told me that, "I know that, if people see the invites, they will come". As to his hate speech, he came to understand that what he wanted to say was anything that could entice reactions from his conservative bubble. In his words, "When I post something and realize it has not gone viral as in the way it should go, if it does not get at least 50 likes, I delete it. [In this case], I believe that what I have published… *might not be exactly what I think* [emphasis added]" (Excerpt 7.14). It is necessary to note, though, that his recognition came at the expense of the denigration of others – both those who had their identities stolen for the production of fake profiles and those targeted by his hate speech. Another form of rewarding civic voice was exemplified by Artur (Excerpt 8.14). After invisibilising elements of himself that, he feared, could be attacked by the "vigilant folks" in his progressive "bubble" (e.g. his eventual sexism), he realized that he did not want to express the voice he was trying to conceal. As a "White, highly-educated middle-class man", he should "be very careful" with what he says. That is, in concealing unwanted aspects of his civic voice, he seemed to have found out which voice he wanted to have. At the same time, his "correction" was triggered by the prospect of attacks. His process of self-discovery appears, thus, to be entangled with self-disciplining. One might wonder, what would happen if his "bubble" was composed of individuals who praise violence – would he act aggressively?

These self-evaluations might inform which voice expressions interviewees might want to construct on Facebook, restarting the prefiguration cycle (see Figure 9.1 below). This constantly possible restarting is suggestive of the instability and volatility of these processes of civic becoming. I do not claim that all civic voice expressions undergo every one of these prefigurations, nor that this cycle is completed in a linear manner. With the exception of the first stage, participants most likely experience these prefigurations at distinct moments and in relation to distinct civic voice expressions.

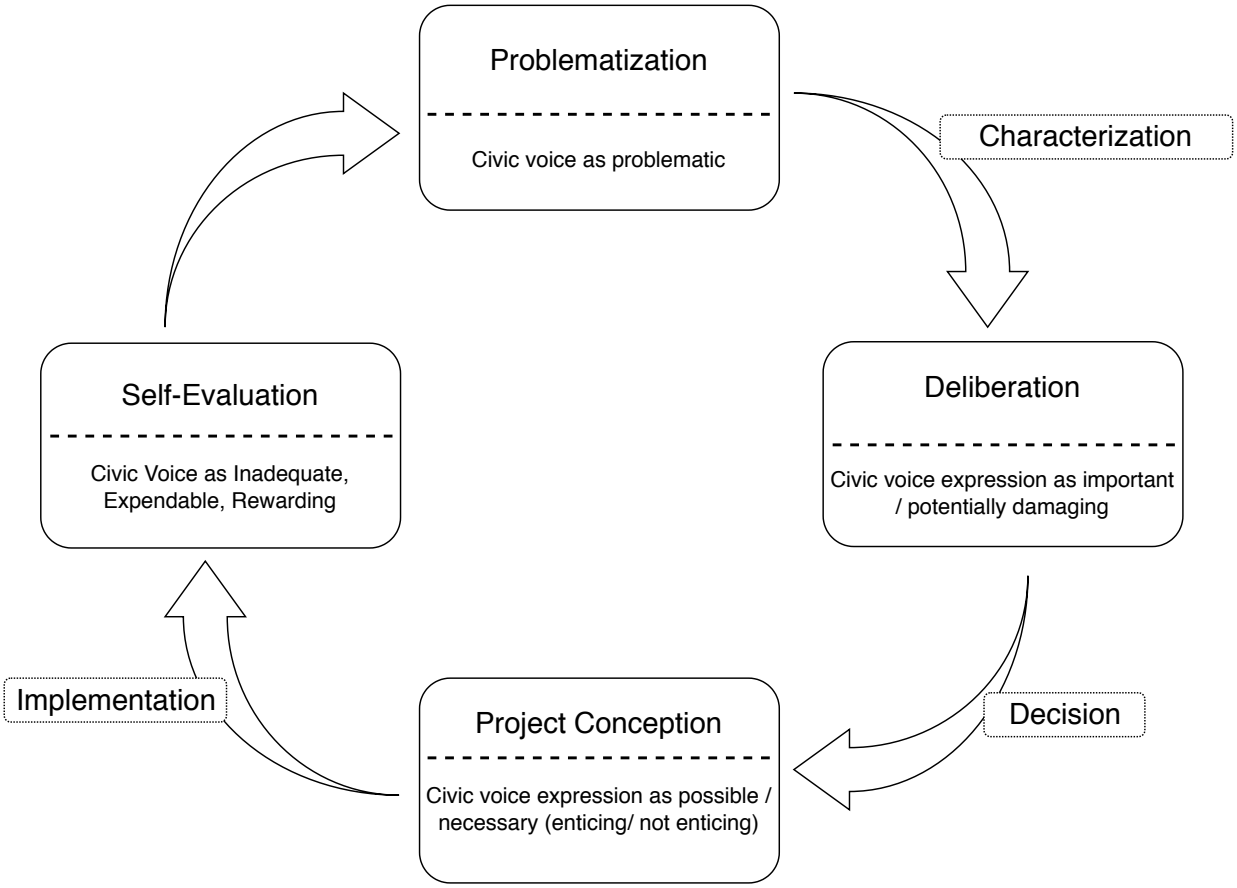

Figure 9.1. Simplified diagram of the prefiguration cycle of civic voice on Facebook. Source: Author.

9.5. Bottom-up Authoritarianism

So far, this chapter has conceptualized the dynamics underlying the empirical findings of this thesis. As the *prefiguration cycle of civic voice* suggests in the previous section, these dynamics have a significant *normative* dimension. That is, my analysis of how civic voice is constituted under the algorithmic visibility regime engendered by Facebook's datafication operations points to a widespread sense of civic misrecognition. Interviewees often described how they felt that they had to silence themselves when talking about politics on Facebook, or how their voice expressions sometimes entailed the denigration of other end users.

This last set of sections tries to explain these misrecognitions. I propose that Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime, largely based on the processes that I have explored in the preceding sections, engender what I term *bottom-up authoritarianism*.[66] In Section 3.4.2, authoritarianism was conceptualized as a *structural* form of misrecognition. Therefore, when I argue that the stories I heard during my interviews seem to reveal a form of authoritarianism, I mean that the civic misrecognitions identified in the prefiguration cycle of civic voice do not seem to be the result of participants' individual idiosyncrasies or chance events. They are much more likely to be associated to a structural element. In the next section, I propose that this element is a paradoxical form of civic imaginary. After explaining the relationship between this imaginary and the sociomaterial understandings of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime (Section 9.3), the last analytical section of this chapter defines bottom-up authoritarianism in greater detail.

9.5.1 A Paradoxical Civic Imaginary

The conceptual framework (see Section 3.6.1) proposed that civic voice is shaped by at least two structural elements – visibility conditions and individuals' "set of implicit assumptions in relation to what civic worth is and to whom it is granted", that is, civic imaginaries. However, that initial conceptualization assumed that these structural elements work separately. This section explores their relationship moving beyond the initial concepts and arguments that initially informed this study. It seems not to be the case that different prefigurations of civic voice were influenced separately by *either* assumptions of visibility *or* assumptions of citizenship. I argue that, largely because of the double porosity of the sociomateriality described in Section 9.3, these two kinds of imaginaries appear fused into a hybrid civic imaginary in which rules of visibility and norms of civic worth are entangled and, as such, orient interviewees prefiguration of their civic voice expressions.

Let me unpack the two interrelated processes which seem to comprise this composite schema. On the one hand, interviewees' assumptions of civic worth seem to have absorbed elements of their assumptions about Facebook's visibility rules. It seems that, on the platform, definitions of what civic worth is and how it is attained are often preceded – and, thus, transformed – by imaginaries of the algorithmic visibility regime.

This is mostly evident in the third stage of the prefiguration cycle ("project conception", see Figure 9.1 above). If civic voice expression is transformed into the very matter through which visibility

[66] Writing from a different theoretical and empirical perspective, Hintz and Milan (2018) also employ the term "bottom-up" to discuss authoritarianism in platforms.

can be controlled, and if visibility must be controlled to enhance the odds that voice can be heard, interviewees have few choices except to adjust their voices to try to expand and reduce their visibility. In implying that being seen/read by some others (or not) is the immediate goal shaping a practice that is unavoidably ethical (civic voice), imaginaries of Facebook's visibility regime[67] were actualized in a way that converted a practice that is not inherently ethical (visibility control) into an immanent normative ideal. Something similar can be seen in the first stage of the prefiguration cycle (*problematization*). As already noted, the interviewees apparently problematized any civic voice expressions, not because of their content (whether or not they comply with some notion of civic worth), but because of their uncertain visibility. It is this status that seems to have produced concerns of invisibilization or denigration, rather than any framework of civic worth itself. Therefore, expressing a civic voice that complies with Facebook's visibility rules becomes the primary condition to become, at least, eligible for civic recognition. The control of visibility seems less an "an end *in itself* [emphasis added]" (Banet-Weiser, 2019, p. 22; Herman, 2013) than a *necessary* stage. Without being able and willing to elicit, avoid and accept datafied reactions from imagined others, it could be argued that interviewees were effectively non-existent as citizens on the platform. This is either because they were invisibilised or because they had (or felt pressured) to abandon the attempt to represent themselves. This dynamic seems to have been present even when participants acted according to the controllable visibility imaginary – which, in theory, separates visibility control and civic voice. Evidence examined in Sections 7.2 and 8.2 shows that this other imaginary was often invoked as a response to assumptions of uncontrollability.

On the other hand, a contextualization of interviewees' assumptions about Facebook's government of visibility seems to occur. In interweaving human and non-human elements, from within and outside the platform, sociomaterial imaginaries can be understood to have worked as blueprints for the participants projection of their own definitions of what is a worthy civic voice, and how and to whom civic worth should be granted and denied.

This is made evident in the second stage of the prefiguration cycle (*deliberation*, see Figure 9.1 above). The imagined others who populated interviewees' descriptions were marked by the chronic and violent iniquities of Brazilian society in regard to race, gender, income and (thanks to the crisis) ideology. Contextualization is noticeable, too, in the descriptions of those who reported *not* trying to control the visibility of their civic voices on Facebook. Some considered themselves the subject of prior misrecognitions regarding their economic and racial positions; therefore, any attempt

[67] In particular, the predictive and uncontrollable imaginaries.

to protect their online voice would be superfluous (e.g. the Black female dancer, Lorena, for whom "the state can murder" her "in many ways", Excerpt 8.30); others apparently understood themselves as already proper citizens – hence, any form of sacrifice would be unacceptable (e.g. the White lawyer Theo, Excerpt 7.29).

Taken together, these co-constitutive processes engender a hybrid and paradoxical civic imaginary, I argue. In this imaginary, the control of visibility seems not a mere condition for the possibility of attaining civic recognition, but *a cost of such recognition*. Since these imagined others are expected to denigrate dissonant voices and cheer (or accept) the denigration of others' voices, interviewees appeared to assume that misrecognizing themselves and others to control their own visibility and increase the likelihood of being recognized as citizens, are necessary courses of action. They misrecognize themselves through the various forms of self-silencing (*misleading profiles, voice disguising, voice correction, voice deletion, voice suppression*, *voice disappearance* and, to a lesser extent, *news association*); they misrecognize others through projects such as *tactical aggression*; and, to some extent, they misrecognize both when resorting to *simplification* and *visual provocations*, which implies that the interviewees often had to supress their legitimate voices and lie, patronize and manipulate their peers. On Facebook, it seems that the possibility of voice passes through the silencing – of oneself or of others, or both.

The formation of civic self-understandings analysed in the fourth stage of the prefiguration cycle (*self-evaluation*, see Figure 9.1 above) could be interpreted as the consequence of how the different participants in this study located themselves in this paradoxical civic imaginary. Those interviewees who described their voices as *inadequate* and, frequently, felt excluded from this order, were, as expected, those who were less willing to accept the need to silence themselves and others; those who classified their self-representations as *expendable* should be able to deal with some form of misrecognition, but not unproblematically. The owners of *rewarding* voices appeared to accept and embrace this imaginary.

This argument does not sit easily with the insights in the literature on similar phenomena. First, this paradoxical imaginary seems to change not the emotional experience of disrespect, but the dynamics that bring it about – how civic worth is granted and denied. In Honneth's (1992) theory, misrecognition stems from a framework of social worth that demeans certain voices as inferior; post-structuralists have for long argued that these frameworks might conflate recognition into misrecognition, becoming apparatuses of control that lead individuals to distort their voices so as to

be recognized (McNay, 2008). Others point to the pervasive but silent invisibilization of citizens through the configuration of spaces and norms of participation (Fraser, 2007). However, my analysis suggests that, in the context of the present study, spaces and norms are, generally, inclusive, and it demonstrates that recognition remains separate – but subjugated – to misrecognition. Furthermore, while distortion of voice seems to lead to, at least, some level of recognition-like interactions, based on the experiences analysed in this thesis, being heard as a proper citizen remains only a possibility. An individual might wholly transform her civic voice expressions so as to control her visibility, but there is no guarantee that any recognition will follow, or that denigration would be avoided, for instance.

Second, in contrast to theories of self-optimization or self-branding (Section 3.5.2), civic voice expressions appear not to be adjusted with the aim of building an improved citizen or maintaining a stable public persona. Transformations were pragmatic and encompassed hateful and controversial self-representations. They were also unstable – several interviewees reported having to interrupt certain civic voice expressions or to alter them so as to avoid denigration.

Third, arguments about how users direct themselves toward "the algorithm" when trying to influence the functioning of a datafied platform (see Section 3.2) might also be nuanced, based on my analysis. In fact, it seems that interviewees oriented themselves toward imagined others, whose constitution and relationship were oriented by the assumed rules of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime, but whose normative subjects originated from a constellation of other structures.

There is another body of research that is more closely linked to my analysis – the work on datafication and authoritarianism, as discussed in the next section.

9.5.2. Authoritarianism without Authorities?

Much of the literature on datafication and authoritarianism tends to adopt a top-down perspective, involving two broad approaches (see Section 3.5.1). One posits that organized authoritarian actors – governments, politicians, parties, social movements, far-right "influencers" – may exploit datafied platforms to bypass accountability, persecute opponents and sow hate, falsehoods and distrust in democratic institutions, with the aim of radicalizing and alienating the sort of ordinary citizen in which this thesis is interested. From this perspective, summarized by Deibert (2019), platforms are not, themselves, authoritarian. Rather, they enable authoritarians. The second approach tends to focus on the kind of non-ideological authoritarian power that these platforms

themselves exert on end users. In this view, the deployment of datafication is premised upon the notion that end users' autonomy has no moral meaning: it amounts to a kind of a commodity that should be analysed scientifically so as to be more efficiently manipulated (e.g. Zuboff, 2019). Although these two views differ in relation to how they characterize the political nature of platforms, neither gives in-depth attention to end user's agency, largely assuming, arguably in neo-Frankfurtian fashion, that platforms, akin to older forms of industrial media, engender and depend upon manipulable individuals, prone to accept authoritarian leaders (Adorno, 2004).

This thesis' conclusions complicate these claims. The authoritarianism engendered by the paradoxical civic imaginary described above does not appear to be limited to the controllers or beneficiaries of datafied platforms. It can be exerted by the billions of end users of these companies' products; this can happen even if these individuals are not "radicalized" by activists, organizations and politicians. Indeed, it was not necessary for anyone to tell, force or convince the interviewees in this study to misrecognize their civic voice expressions or to denigrate others. They seemed to have done so because they understood that these were the necessary (if sometimes contestable and distressing) courses of action to take if they wanted to be respected (or at least not disrespected) as citizens. If they wanted to be heard when they talked on Facebook. Of course, authorities frequently appeared in my interviews (the state, the police, a security guard, arguably relatives and friends). However, these imagined others did not architect the experiences of civic misrecognitions I was told about – at least not willingly.

Likewise, I found no signs of coercion or Manichean attempts by Facebook to seduce individuals into any authoritarian ethos. The insight on conspicuous invisibility (Section 9.2) suggests the opposite – these consequences appeared to be largely contrary to the platform's goals. Thus, it is not only that this authoritarianism appears to flourish even in the absence of directives from overtly authoritarian actors who use Facebook's datafication operations. It also, on the basis of this study, can be understood to flourish precisely because the platform does not seem to be able to manipulate users as it might aim to. This unpremeditated, diffuse and unforced self-authoritarianization demonstrates that, notwithstanding datafied power's radically novel operations, its consequences for the constitution of civic subjects (citizens) are, conceivably, not ontologically different from other contemporary kinds of power – which, as Foucault (2002) theorized decades ago, unfolded through a relation of the self to the self, often producing consequences not initially predicted by controllers and designers of social structures (Brown, 2006).

I suggest that the complex of structural conditions and patterned practices that realize the sorts of misrecognitions examined in Section 9.4, is a form of *bottom-up authoritarianism*: an authoritarianism that involves but is not *created* by any single "authority". Based on this study, this bottom up authoritarianism can be said to emerge out of ordinary end users' voluntary (but not autonomous) disposition to adopt civic voice expressions that, at different levels and with distinct consequences, imply misrecognition of themselves and others. To be sure, this authoritarianism is not ideological and overt. In this study, it seems to affect individuals from the right to the left, and seldom appeared in the interviewees' discourse as linked to open intolerance and violence. It might seem odd to say that banal actions, such as using one's own Facebook page to "like" one's own posts, are authoritarian. This apparent innocuousness is, I argue, typical of the phenomenon I am describing. Turned into means for a noble end, authoritarian actions might appear as trivialized, ordinary, good, and ironically fun, almost relieved from the symbolic darkness that usually envelops the term (recall descriptions about "zoeira" – Section 7.3.1).

However, bottom-up authoritarianism is, I suggest, far from harmless. For most interviewees, the price for trying to be who they want to be seemed fairly high. Their descriptions display widespread unease with having to abide by the recognition costs dynamic that is at the centre of the civic imaginary depicted in the previous section. This unease seemed likely to constitute silent, distant, frustrated and, perhaps above all, fearful citizens. For others, this game has allowed unprecedented feelings of "empowerment", a form of civic recognition they rarely if ever had experienced before. Some seemed to thrive, others to retreat. However, those who thrived were not particularly troubled by that paradoxical civic imaginary (Fabricio, Helena, Luis), while individuals who appeared to be most committed to the idea of mutual recognition (e.g. Gael, Humberto, Olivia, Joaquim) were those who told me they were actively trying to limit their civic voice on Facebook. From the perspective adopted in this thesis, both groups can be characterized as having authoritarian characteristics, at least on Facebook. While this was more evident in the case of Fabricio, for example, who is proud about his hate speech, the hurtful self-imposed silence of individuals such as Humberto implicates a self-denial of recognition. This is not to say they are equally responsible for their authoritarian practices and resulting self-understandings (Humberto clearly is not), or that self-misrecognition equates, in ethical terms, with misrecognition of others (it does not). These are intricate issues that are worthy of more exploration.

My overall point is that the voices that resulted from the prefiguration cycle described in Section 9.4 are hardly conducive to a "democratic ethical life" based on "social freedom" (Honneth,

2014, p. 63). At the individual level, this means that individuals such as the participants in this study, are not developing their political capacities as they could be expected to. Their autonomy seems harmed: they are not able to be the citizens that they could be, want to be or ought to be. Interestingly, though, the restraints are self-imposed, even if not self-created. At the societal level, without proper democratic citizens, it is unlikely that proper democracy can exist. To say that Facebook, at least when contextualized by troubling democracies such as Brazil's, appears to undermine end users' ability to constitute themselves as free citizens is tantamount to saying that this combination also erodes the possibility of a democratic culture. I return briefly to this in Section 10.3, when discussing the Brazilian context.

Judging from my interviews, it is unclear how this complex kind of authoritarianism might be resisted. Since Facebook's visibility regime is not necessarily understood as denying civic worth itself,[68] it appears to become particularly difficult for interviewees to envisage a way of struggling for their civic voice on the platform. Recall that, in Honneth's theory, the struggle for recognition (i.e. the attempt to change how social worth is defined and granted), depends on both experiencing the demeaning emotions of misrecognition and the realization that these emotions are produced by structural conditions – that they are shared. Most of participants in this study did seem to feel this "moral injury", to use Honneth's term, associated with their inability to be themselves on Facebook (e.g. Humberto, Excerpt 8.26). However, they experienced more difficulty visualizing how to challenge this condition, due, possibly, to the hybrid origin of the civic imaginary I described in the previous section, which are composed of assumptions about Facebook and a plethora of non-Facebook structures. No-one, in my sample, appeared to describe any project that could be interpreted as a struggle *for voice*. Even practices that originated from interviewees' creative and informed attempts to influence the algorithmic visibility regime seemed, ultimately, to be another way of playing the algorithmic game (echoing Bucher, 2012).

I suggest that my participants' actions toward Facebook's infrastructure might be unwanted by the platform, but these actions cannot be deemed resistance, in the ethical sense of the word. They merely produce more data. Bottom-up authoritarianism, therefore, can be understood as being driven not by individuals' gullibility or ignorance. On this basis, it seems reasonable to suggest that the projects of visibility control that give rise to misrecognized or misrecognizing voices are underpinned

[68] An exception is perhaps how some interviewees conceived of Facebook's content moderation system, which was imagined by them as being based on a clear definition of civic worth (e.g. Luis, Fabio, Rafael). However, none of them knew how to oppose to this perceived problem.

by some form of critical reflection on the platform's inner workings and may be enhanced by some knowledge about others and the regime itself (e.g. Fabricio, Excerpt 7.6), what casts doubt on the efficacy of propositions overly focussed on enhancing the literacy about the platform's inner workings, or even those who call for transparency measures.

From the point of view of this study's participants, it seems that the only form of resistance to the algorithmic visibility regime is to abdicate from any form of datafied interaction, as Pedro (Excerpt 7.27), for instance, tried to do (and even this attempt's success was uncertain, as Amanda told me – Excerpt 8.27). Disconnection becomes understood – in a non-programmatic manner – as an act of political defiance (see Mejías, 2013). Put another way, civic disengagement, which for decades was assumed to be one of democracy's most crippling trends (Dahlgren, 2014; Norris, 2011), appears, in this context, as arguably the most autonomous approach to citizenship. Or, rather, the action that might at least allow for the possibility of autonomy.

Before concluding this chapter, I would like to highlight how bottom-up authoritarianism is, ultimately, indissociable from the other concepts I have advanced above. Without *conspicuous invisibility*, there would be no *sociomaterial imaginaries*; without sociomaterial imaginaries, there would be no *imagined others*; and without these imaginaries and others, there would be no paradoxical civic imaginary, the structural element that engenders *bottom-up authoritarianism*.

9.7. Conclusion

This chapter develops the main conceptual insights of this thesis. Through the re-examination of the empirical findings discussed in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, three sets of interrelated concepts were formulated (see Appendix 7). I drew on my analysis of interviewees' schematizations to argue that Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime can be understood as becoming imaginable by being materialized as *conspicuously invisible* (Section 9.2). The uncertainty that marks this condition, coupled with the profoundly social dimension of these schematizations, engender imaginaries that are not only multiple and contradicting, but also *sociomaterial*; that is, composed of combinations of human and non-human imagined elements, giving rise to what, in the second section, I call *imagined others* (Section 9.3). I then conceptualized how these imaginaries appear to support a series of prefigurations of participants' civic voice expressions, triggering various civic recognitions/misrecognitions and transforming their civic self-understandings. This *prefiguration cycle*, I contended, corresponds to the processes of civic becoming which this thesis set out to explore (Section 9.4). In the last set of sections (9.5), I tried to explain and conceptualize the normative

dimension of these processes. I proposed that, in making possible a paradoxical civic imaginary (Section 9.5.1), Facebook' algorithmic visibility regime seems to gives rise to a structural form of civic misrecognition, which entails a kind of *bottom-up authoritarianism* (Section 9.5.2). End users may not need to hold authoritarian ideologies, to be radicalized or coerced by others to develop and engage in authoritarian practices. It suffices to establish misrecognition as the cost of the possibility of civic recognition.

These insights are the basis for the discussion in Chapter 10, the final chapter in this thesis.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

10.1 Introduction

This thesis began with my description of a scene I witnessed in 2013. I would like to finish with another – much more recent – memory. It is of an event that took place in September 2018 and occurred in London, not Brasília. Instead of the *Congresso Nacional's* curious modernist shapes, I could see the monuments in Trafalgar Square, reminiscent of the British Empire – Nelson's Column, gigantic lions, equestrian statues. Similar to the scene in Brasília, there was a group of strangers – mostly Brazilian expats. But this time, I was no longer a journalist, but a doctoral student. Rather than observing them, I felt free to join them. "*Ele não! Ele não*!" [not him! not him!], we chanted. A tourist asked me who the pronoun "him" referred to. It was not difficult to figure out: the name and picture of Jair Bolsonaro, the extremist conservative candidate who appeared poised to be elected Brazil's president, were prominent on nearly all of the posters and stickers being displayed – with some images sporting a Hitler moustache. Our message could not have been clearer: anyone but him (and his acolytes) would be acceptable. Somewhat similar to 2013, anti-Bolsonaro protests were taking place in hundreds of cities, in Brazil and abroad. However, the electrifying climate in that long night in June 2013 had little to do with our sobriety that afternoon in London. It was unclear to me whether the other expats truly believed that an electoral turnaround was possible, that any demonstration would be able to stop Bolsonaro. I was deeply sceptical. After the ascension of Donald Trump and the Brexit referendum, what would have been an unbelievable shock seemed to be an almost unavoidable outcome. Nonetheless, I spent most of my waking hours those days on Facebook, publishing desperate posts, responding to strangers' comments, beginning interminable discussions and quarrels with random people, trying to convince whomever could read me that Bolsonaro was a virulent lunatic who talked, repeatedly, about killing, torturing and raping political rivals. Most of my interlocutors did not appear to care. Within weeks, Bolsonaro won the election in a far-right landslide. His rise seemed to me at the time diffusely associated with the conclusions of the thesis I was writing.

This final chapter revisits these conclusions. It first distils the empirical findings and conceptual insights to offer a synthetic answer to the main research question – **How does Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime shape the civic voice of ordinary end users on the platform?** Then, it summarizes my key contributions to, mainly, debates about the civic ramifications of datafication and about datafication power itself. Before concluding, this chapter discusses the Brazilian context, explores the limitations of this study and points to some future research directions.

10.2. Points of Departure, Points of Arrival

This section recaps the empirical, conceptual and epistemological points of departure of the thesis and recapitulates where my analysis led – the points of arrival of the study.

Empirically, my chief premise is set out in Chapter 2. I suggested that the Brazilian crisis engendered (and was largely engendered by) a wave of ordinary processes of civic becoming. In a democracy historically marked by the low presence of the "people", these processes appeared to represent a turning point. What distinguished this turmoil from previous turbulences was not just the centrality of these newly engaged ordinary individuals, but the fact that their political involvement unfolded mainly in a new sort of space – datafied platforms. If we are to understand which citizens emerged from the Brazilian crisis, it is important to understand the role played by Facebook (Brazil's most popular platform) in these processes. This is the focus of this study.

Using elements of social practices theory to bridge recognition theory, critical data studies and sociology of visibility, Chapter 3 constructed a non-naturalist conceptual framework to investigate these particularly located processes of civic becoming. This framework is supported by two main pillars. The concept of *civic voice* was examined to flesh out the notion of citizenship as a self-constitutive practice with a normative horizon. In this view, political self-representations seek (and often ought) to be recognized by others. Based on these responses (or lack of them), individuals come to understand who they are (or are not) as citizens. The nexus of civic actions and self-understandings that compose civic voice is, thus, both structured by and evaluated against shared assumptions of what citizens ought to do and be – which I termed *civic imaginary*. Practices imbued with the values of mutual recognition were depicted as crucial to the constitution of autonomous citizens and, thus, of democratic life – or, alternatively, to the flourishing of authoritarianism. The notion of *algorithmic visibility regime* was advanced as a way of explaining the kinds of structures datafied platforms, such as Facebook, are, and how their intertwined visibility vectors (sight and readability) are used to try to control end users. This form of power, I suggested, is best theorized as neither the deployment of resources (datafication operations) nor only as schemas ("notions", "imaginaries", "folk theories"), but rather as the materialization of the former to direct the construction of the latter and, in this way, order the prefiguration of end users' actions towards the platform. The main conceptual point of departure in this study is that the shaping of civic voices by Facebook's datafication operations is best theorized as an indirect process. It begins with end users making sense of the platform's government of visibility (schematization), which might give rise to social imaginaries of the algorithmic visibility regime. Then, these imaginaries may prompt end users to transform their civic voice expressions to

control how they are visibilized so as to be heard on Facebook, creating new experiences of (mis)recognition and transforming their civic self-understanding.

Underlying much of the theoretical discussion in Chapter 3 is the main epistemological position in this study – that end users may be able to reflect on physically invisible datafication operations, act in relation to their reflections and, when asked, talk about these actions and reflections. Hence, my choice of in-depth interviews with ordinary Brazilians as my method (Chapter 4). After the examination in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, of the descriptions collected from interviews with 47 of those newly engaged ordinary Brazilians, Chapter 9 revisited my findings to elaborate on the conceptual insights in relation to the sub-questions guiding this study.

Building on those insights, now I propose a synthetic answer to my main research question. In brief, I argue that, at least in Brazil, Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime seems to shape civic voices by making possible the construction of a new understanding of how civic worth can be socially recognized, enacting a civic imaginary that is particular to the platform (Section 9.5.1). This imaginary does not explicitly denigrate or invisibilise any category of end user (as recognition scholars tend to argue), nor does it offer them recognition in exchange for compliance with unjust norms (as the critics of recognition scholars tend to retort). Rather, it implies that enhancing the odds of being heard depends on controlling one's visibility on Facebook, which, in turn, hinges on misrecognizing oneself and others. At the core of this civic imaginary there is, thus, a paradox.

This paradox seemed to be crucial to how interviewees represented themselves as citizens on Facebook. Its consequences can be seen throughout what I designated as the *prefiguration cycle of civic voice* (Section 9.4). It systematizes the empirical findings that emerged from the investigation of SRQs 3.1 and 3.2 and, in this way, conceptualizes the processes of civic becoming that the thesis set out to investigate. To be seen (and likely heard) by their peers, many interviewees considered hateful, simplified and manipulative civic voice expressions to be necessary. They seemed to infer that if Facebook's news feed privileges posts and comments that receive large amounts of datafied reactions, any expression that can entice others into reacting is understood as itself enticing. Disrespect for others appeared as an unavoidable consequence of the interviewee's own attempts to be respected. The paradox emerged, also, in the multiple sorts of self-imposed silences – deletions, omissions, lies – whereby participants demeaned themselves to avoid being demeaned (or fired or murdered) by others. Since they imagined, ultimately, having no control over how their online actions would be read and seen, it was found that they appeared to believe that the only way to prevent

having their voices denigrated was a sort of preventive self-invisibilization. Surely, many voice expressions were enabled or tweaked without significant harm – but these visibility control projects seemed not to be deemed sufficient to secure real control.

Participants' sense of civic self was not shielded from these adjustments. By engendering intersubjective (mis)recognitions, these particularly shaped voice expressions were shown to indirectly constitute interviewees' civic self-understandings on the platform. For many, the prospect of having to misrecognize others and themselves seemed unbearable. They tended to see themselves as inadequate citizens on Facebook, unable or unwilling to even try to be heard. Others came to comprehend their voices as expendable: certain self-representations would have to be sacrificed so other expressions could at least become eligible for recognition. Even when adjustments were described as rewarding, more or less immediate forms of silencing of others and selves were involved. In sum, I found that my participants could rarely be the citizens they expected to be on Facebook. In eroding the possibility of legitimate recognition, that paradoxical civic imaginary seems to undermine the initial condition for individual autonomy, engendering a specific form of *bottom-up authoritarianism*, as I describe this structural dynamic of misrecognition. This is the main conceptual development proposed in this study. It also the culmination of other processes formulated in Chapter 9, which suggest how Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime seem to have enabled this seeming state of affairs.

The enabling role played by the regime originates from what seems to be an unintended consequence of Facebook's datafication power, as suggested in Section 9.2. The analysis of the interviews indicates that the platform's attempt to direct how end users imagine and act towards its algorithmic visibility regime backfires, but in a generative manner. Facebook controllers might want to obscure this regime, rendering its government of visibility as a natural function of what end users imagine as "relevant". Nevertheless, in being minutely personalized, Facebook's news feed not only becomes a central element in participants' everyday lives, about which an abundant amount of information is consumed (individually and socially). It is also transformed into a heuristic artefact. Through it, interviewees can apparently observe the proliferation of responses (real or not) to their offline and online actions (on or off Facebook). These responses and information (and the improvised probes their combination allows for) seemed to lead the interviewees to assume that something ("the filter", "the algorithm", "Facebook"), is ostensibly defining who can visibilize whom on the platform. Yet, as the infrastructure remains physically invisible, what this "something" is cannot be fully known, it seems. Therefore, instead of being concealed, the regime appears to be materialized as

conspicuously invisible. It is such materialization that permits Facebook's government of visibility to be schematized as it is, I proposed, in response to SRQ 1.

Conspicuous invisibility – and the fact that to surface it depends on interactions with other human actors – seems to give rise to three contradictory, but concomitant imaginaries about the algorithmic visibility regime (controllable, predictive and uncontrollable visibility imaginaries). More than sets of taken-for-granted assumptions about social relations structured by datafication operations (as initially proposed in my conceptual framework), these imaginaries seem to be populated by imaginations that are co-constituted by human and non-human elements. Invoking the notion of sociomateriality, I advanced the idea of *sociomaterial imaginaries* to describe these schemas and reconceptualize the empirical findings related to SRQ 2. In this study, the idea of sociomaterial imaginary is particularly helpful to understand what I describe as *imagined other*s, which are composed of a combination of participants' assumptions about the platform's visibility regime and their assumptions about real-life individuals, organizations and institutions. Three categories of these others were found to dominate the descriptions of interviewees: *controllable others, algorithmic bubble* and *imagined surveillants*.

This sociomateriality helps to explain the paradoxical civic imaginary which is behind bottom-up authoritarianism. Sociomateriality entails that assumptions about the rules governing who visibilizes whom on Facebook are hybridized by interviewees' broader relational understandings of which civic voice is deemed worthy in a country marked by long-standing inequalities, state authoritarianism and elitism. The result is *particular* imagined others who seem to be assumed to hold *particular* ideas about which voice ought to be recognized or misrecognized. In the descriptions offered by my Brazilian interviewees, what makes Facebook's civic imaginary paradoxical is not *only* the assumption that they must elicit reactions from others to be seen or that they have no control over how they are seen/read. Rather, the paradox appears to emerge from the combination of these assumptions with the understanding that *their* imagined bubble is awaiting disrespectful voice expressions, that *their* imagined surveillants might act on to demean or harm them; that the societal barriers to *their* personal development justify the costs of being heard on Facebook (Section 9.5.1). Their imaginations seemed to be linked to their social positions. Being a woman, transgender, Black, a man, White, affluent appeared in the descriptions of some of the interviewees as a critical factor to how they imagined specific others and, thus, to their expected recognitions and misrecognitions within Facebook. Therefore, in this research, bottom-up authoritarianism emerges out of the contextualization of sociomaterial imaginaries of the platform's algorithmic visibility regime within

Brazil's political conditions and history. It should be noted that, based on this study, it is not possible to claim that this kind of authoritarianism is intrinsic to the platform itself, or to expect that it occurs everywhere with the same intensity (see Section 10.4 below).

Each of the conceptual insights in this study paves the way to the next one, albeit in an indeterminate manner: *bottom-up authoritarianism* hinges on *sociomaterial imaginaries* (but is not determined by them). In turn, these imaginaries depend upon the *conspicuous invisibility* of the algorithmic visibility regime (but this materialization of the algorithmic visibility regime does not define which sociomaterial imaginaries will be constructed).

10.3. Conceptual and Empirical Contributions

This study's conclusions have implications for how the relationship between datafication and democracy might be conceptualized. *Bottom-up authoritarianism* indicates that civic unfreedom might be produced by end users from across the ideological spectrum as a result of their rightful and often well-informed attempts to satisfy an emotional and ethical need, and not only by malicious state agents, far-right activists or platforms. While Facebook's business model is indissociable from the misrecognitions this thesis has examined, the platform's controllers cannot be said to have wished to engender *this* sort of political outcome. The authoritarian civic voice expressions I examined seem, ultimately, to originate from an unintended consequence of Facebook's contradictory datafication power (to which the platform seems to have turned a blind eye). (This is not to say, of course, that Facebook is exonerated from its extraordinary irresponsibility over the years, epitomized in the "move fast and break things" motto.)

Furthermore, my conclusions invite consideration of the contextual dimension of authoritarianism in datafied platforms. How end users imagine themselves in relation to certain others seems strongly associated to structures that are not intrinsically datafied such as race, gender and income. In this study, minorities appeared to be particularly affected by this dynamic precisely because of their minority status. In this sense, my conceptual insight establishes a link with broader debates on how automated systems seem to disproportionately penalize the most vulnerable, and reinforces suggestions of decentring purely technological solutions for the social consequences of datafication (Gangadharan & Niklas, 2019; Eubanks, 2018; Noble, 2018; see also Franklin, 2013). From a broader view, bottom-up authoritarianism may be understood as a new construct to understand the relative role played by datafied platforms in the erosion of the very possibility of mutual recognition and, thus, of an "ethical democratic life" (Honneth, 2014).

In seeking to understand the relationship between democracy and datafication, this thesis contributes to the general debate on the nature of Facebook's datafication power as well. The notion of an algorithmic visibility regime has proven a fruitful framing for this study. The usage of prefiguration allowed me to break down the algorithmic visibility regime's control technique into three interdependent components (resource materialization, schemas and prefigured action), increasing the level of detailed insight into the processes that constitute the shaping of a complex social practice such as civic voice. Yet, the interview data analysis allowed me to suggest improvements to the framework initially proposed and led to an understanding that perhaps comes closer to representing how such a regime *actually* works. Table 10.1 below updates Table 3.1. It provides a summary of my initial theorization approach and how it can be enhanced drawing upon the conceptual insights formulated in Chapter 9. Rather than being materialized as a mere personalized news feed, there is the ambiguity presented by conspicuous invisibility; instead of restricting end users' assumptions about the platforms' visibility rules (schemas) to the idea that the news feed is made up of "relevant" content, there is the messy complexity of the three sociomaterial imaginaries and their offshoot, the concept of imagined others. Finally, instead of only one form of positive prefiguration, I found a fragmented cycle of interrelated prefigurations.

	Materialization of Resources	**Schemas**		**Prefiguration Ordering**
Algorithmic Visibility regime (conceptual framework)	Personalized News Feed	Relevant		All actions toward news feed content are enticing
	Inscrutable Infrastructure	None (Unimaginable)		All actions toward the infrastructure are impossible
Algorithmic Visibility Regime (post-analysis)	Conspicuous Invisibility	Sociomaterial Imaginaries	Imagined others	Prefiguration Cycle (See Figure 9.1)

Table 10.1. Summary and comparison between two conceptualizations of Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime. Source: Author.

This post-analysis extension of the conceptual framework contradicts expectations (common for example in some accounts of political micro-targeting) that the platform might possess some kind of (deterministic) control over its end users. Its datafication operations have been shown to play *some*

role in the constitution of imaginaries, actions and self-understandings, but which role is difficult to define *a priori*. If my first formulation, arguably, was over reliant on assumptions about the platform's intentions, this reformulation seems closer to late-Foucauldian theory which inspired much of my thinking. Datafication power works in ways that are often uncertain and faceless – and yet, it might be highly productive.

Some of the conceptual insights that contribute to this revamped version of the concept of algorithmic visibility regime might be considered, in their own right, relevant to specific problems within the field of critical data studies. The notion of *conspicuous invisibility* provides insight into how ordinary end users make sense of platforms' inner workings by suggesting that their infrastructures might become imaginable, not due merely to a "break down", but thanks to the good performance of datafication power. *Imagined other* was advanced as a way of developing the concept of imagined audience in the context of datafied platforms. The algorithmic government of visibility by Facebook might inform not only the collapse but also the mental reconstruction of contexts of communication, engendering types of "others" that are defined by their relative positions to end users, and allowing for the incorporation of contextual elements. Also, in decentring "algorithms" or other computational procedures, and underscoring constitutional relationships between a plethora of components, the idea of *sociomaterial imaginaries* enlightens discussions about the understandings end users hold of platforms' datafication operations.

This thesis did not aim to contribute to the debate on the transformation of Brazilian democracy since 2013, but some provisional ideas might be offered. As signalled in the introduction to this chapter, while no linear connection can be established, I find it hard to dissociate bottom-up authoritarianism from the ascendency in Brazil of authoritarians like Bolsonaro. Given the importance of Facebook to Brazilian ordinary end users, who either actively produced or passively allowed this to happen, it seems reasonable to suppose that the likely self-authoritarianization of their civic voices on the platform had some kind of influence on this change of direction. In my fieldwork, I learnt how expressing one's civic voice on Facebook can be a frustrating, frightening and cowardly practice. Many of the stories that I heard were told by citizens who had become disillusioned with the possibility of representing themselves freely, who were fearful of the consequences of doing so, and who were convinced that demeaning others was a necessary, justifiable or satisfying way of expressing their voice. Some of the ordinary people I met in São Paulo in 2017 had learned to enjoy speaking like Bolsonaro; others seemed to feel incapable of standing up to figures like him; some few appeared to had given up. The consequences of bottom-up authoritarianism might go beyond what happens on

Facebook. It is fair to assume that these processes of civic becoming on the platform might have some influence on how individuals voted, whether they attended street protest and made political decisions in spheres that are not overtly political (e.g. workplace, household). As it is obvious, the citizens constituted through bottom-up authoritarianism are not *digital* citizens, as sometimes they are called, but simply *citizens*, acting within and outside of platforms like Facebook.

Moreover, these citizens need not be only ordinary citizens. It might be that authoritarian leaders have not only electorally benefited from, but have been themselves constituted by bottom-up authoritarianism as well. This is not to say that they were necessarily "radicalized" by their usage of the platform. However, it is reasonable to infer that, on Facebook and similar platforms, this sort of politician has found a place where their authoritarian selves are accepted, cherished and incentivized, becoming, thus, liberated and empowered.

For decades, Brazil's democracy was marked by a low level of non-electoral participation, which allowed social change, most of the time, to be the business of a tiny elite, as explained in Section 2.3. The arrival of datafied platforms, along with broader and long-term changes, does seem to have transformed this aspect. There have never been more chances for Brazilians to exert their civic voices and never have so many indeed exerted their voices. However, I have pointed out that the kind of citizen that seems to be constituted by these experiences is not necessarily conducive to democracy. Put another way, an inversion of Brazil's democratic paradox, to use Mouffe's (2000) expression again (see Section 1.2), might be underway. Instead of a society in which people's sovereignty is ignored or repressed, as before, the country seems to have an increasingly powerful demos and a more or less threatened political elite. Yet, this might entail not further democratization, but the opposite. At the time of writing, it was difficult to envisage which citizens, in which spaces, could reorient the country's fortunes – despite the considerable discontentment with Bolsonaro .

10.4. Limitations, Future Research and Alternatives Interpretations

Given the relatively small size of my sample, the extent to which the insights from this study can be generalized needs consideration. In this section, I highlight limitations of this thesis, avenues for future research and several potential alternative interpretations of my results which might have emerged if I employed a different conceptual framework.

Further research is needed to establish whether the patterns of practices and imaginaries described by the interviewees in this study are likely to be repeated by other individuals. It seems

probable that my insights into how Facebook's visibility regime is schematized and imagined might be shared by many other people, Brazilians or not. This is because these insights refer, primarily, to how the platform functions and, despite eventual tweaks and localized testing of alternative interface configurations, this functioning is essentially the same for all, or most, of its end users. Much more care is needed with regard to the generalizability of my insights about imagined others, the prefigurations of civic voice and bottom-up authoritarianism. These insights encompass multiple factors – not just how Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime functions, but also individuals' many assumptions about themselves and others. It might be, for instance, that individuals living in more functional democracies, where civic recognition is more widely and equitably protected and guaranteed, imagine other social actors as being more willing to listen, discuss and be respectful. It might be that there are variations within Brazil, due to the country's significant geographical/economic disparities (see Section 2.2), or differences between politically engaged and non-engaged end users (see Section 4.4.2). These possibilities invite future research to compare specific populations or countries – some of which might be experiencing, as Brazil, widespread processes of civic becoming on datafied platforms. These projects might, but need not, be qualitative. My results could inform statistically representative surveys designed to tackle similar problems. Furthermore, future research could investigate the role of bottom-up authoritarianism for political actors such as politicians, parties and social movements, as suggested in the previous section. This issue is particularly intriguing in relation to actors whose current prominence is strongly associated with the dominance of datafied platforms as public spaces, in Brazil or elsewhere.

Another limitation regards the temporality of my findings and insights – to what extent are they time limited? Research on digital media often runs the risk of quickly becoming dated. The period between my fieldwork, at the beginning of 2017, and the conclusion of this study, in mid-2019, was particularly turbulent. The series of scandals in which Facebook was embroiled forced it to repeatedly change the design of its products. The logic of the news feed was altered several times in attempts to reduce "low-quality" content and to enhance engagement; *ad hoc* content moderation to prevent abusive speech, falsehoods and illegal content became much more common; and initiatives to enhance end users' awareness of the platform's inner workings were enacted (Dreyfuss & Lapowsky, 2019). Furthermore, the platform responded with transparency measures such as publishing its content moderation guidelines (Bickert, 2018), allowing users to check who paid for a political ad (Cellan-Jones, 2018) and the launch of a media campaign on various issues such as "fake news" (Tiku, 2018). Mark Zuckerberg (2019) even promised to effectively end Facebook as we know it, saying that "the future is private". These changes and pledges are related, precisely, to how the platform's

algorithmic visibility regime works. As such, they may have impacted on how end users, including my interviewees, schematize, imagine and try to control the visibility of their civic voices. Nevertheless, I suggest that my conceptual insights offer an interesting framework to apply to other datafied platforms that appear to operate under similar logics. The modified version of the concept of an algorithmic visibility regime (see Table 10.1 above) could be used to study political videos on Google's YouTube, for example, where, it is claimed that over 80% of end users click on algorithmically recommended videos (Pew Research Centre, 2018a). This sort of future research might but need not refer to politics. Algorithmic visibility regimes (and how they are imagined) likely influence many other kinds of communicative practices on datafied platforms – in relation to end users' personal and professional lives, for instance.

Additionally, the normative insights in this study cannot be generalized to encompass all of the consequences of datafied platforms for civic voice. It is possible, for example, that, on many occasions, civic voice expressions on Facebook are not or are only marginally affected by end users' imaginaries of the regime – indeed, some interviewees pointed to precisely this (see Sections 7.4 and 8.4). My theoretical assumption that individuals are constantly interpreting reality may have skewed the analysis in this study away from actions that are only marginally influenced by people's explicit intentions or not affected at all by them. It might also be, for instance, that during our conversations, the interviewees remembered only those experiences that were emotionally engaging.[69] An interesting future research direction that could mitigate this issue might involve the use of the platform's "Activity Log" (which lists all end users' actions) as an interview prompt. Participants could be asked to login in to their accounts and to go through their logs, explaining their actions in relation to their assumptions about the algorithmic visibility regime and their expectations of recognition/misrecognition. Furthermore, possibly positive aspects of datafication for democracy were not addressed in this study because this project was located, largely, in a troubled empirical context – the Brazilian crisis – and motivated by my curiosity regarding Facebook's role in it. However, Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime might be strategically used, for example, to better inform or organize citizens to stand up to authoritarian actors. Thus, I do not claim that Facebook's inner workings are solely, or even necessarily, involved in authoritarian dynamics. As Robin Mansell (2017, p. 46) suggests, "[i]t is misleading to argue that digitally mediated communication in the digital era is wholly exploitative or that it is fundamentally liberating". It should also be noted that my aim was not to elucidate how interviewees see themselves as citizens overall, if, by "citizen", one means a

[69] At the same time, these rarely reflected upon and thus scarcely recalled actions might be less important for the construction of civic self-understandings.

complete civic self-understanding which is likely influenced by many experiences that have not been studied here. While important (even central) to most of my interviewees, Facebook is not the sole space where they might exert their civic voices and become citizens.

Lastly, alternative theoretical framings might have been drawn upon to interpret the corpus of data in this study and this might have yielded interesting interpretations. First, a focus on critical accounts of neoliberal rationality might have informed an examination of the relations between datafication, citizenship and the socioeconomic system in which platforms such as Facebook have flourished (Brown, 2015). This might have allowed me to situate my analysis in wider historical trends and to discuss the function of neoliberal logics of commodification in the authoritarian voices documented in this study. I also considered developing my conceptual framework around theories of mediatization, in particular, its culturalist variances (e.g. Hepp, 2013), what might have helped to conceptualize the relations between Facebook's government of visibility and interviewees' individual and social contexts in greater depth. Similarly, the notion of "mediation opportunity structure" (Cammaerts, 2012) might have been applied to elicit understanding of how lay people relate to media technologies for political ends. A final concept that was considered (and employed in Magalhães, 2018) was Foucault's (1984) treatment of subjectivation. While his thinking would have enabled a stronger focus on ethical subjectivity, I judged that it would not be sufficiently informative regarding how, precisely, subjects are (and ought to be) formed – thus, my choice of recognition as a core construct. Generally, these alternative theoretical framings would have made it difficult to develop the notion of imaginaries as a key element of my conceptual framework and, arguably, to articulate the concepts of materiality, action and self-understanding in the way I have found helpful in my study.

10.5. Conclusion

The research for this thesis intended to understand the role of datafication power in a kind of process that, between 2013 and 2018, contributed to upend Brazil's political order – the unprecedented civic involvement of previously disengaged ordinary people, largely through datafied platforms, and specifically through Facebook. More than informing the series of collective events that came to be known as "the crisis" (protests, impeachment, corruption scandal), these processes of civic becoming called into question the very nature of Brazil's democratic life.

Inspired by non-naturalist accounts of citizenship, I suggested that my study would demand the development of two principal concepts: one to account for the constitutive (and normative) relationship between acting politically and becoming a citizen in a democracy (which I defined as civic

voice); the other to theorize the power techniques enacted by the datafied spaces where this acting and becoming unfold (which I defined as an algorithmic visibility regime). The ways in which Facebook's algorithmic visibility may shape the civic voice of its ordinary end users during the Brazilian crisis (this thesis' overall problem), however, are not straightforward, I suggested. The computational operations used by the platform to read end users' actions – which define how they see (and are seen by) others on its interface – may not directly produce civic voice expressions. These operations, I proposed initially, might be materialized by Facebook to direct how they are made sense of by end users – a process that might be political but is not necessarily about citizenship. Thus, I argued that their understandings of these operations – how they imagine them – might be the immediate structural elements shaping civic voice expressions. I expected that they would do so by transforming end users' expectations of visibility, and, thus, their assumptions about the possibility of being recognized (or misrecognized) as a citizen on Facebook.

The thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with 47 of those ordinary Brazilian end users suggested that this theorization provided a productive – although not definitive – conceptual framework to tackle this study's overall research question. I concluded that Facebook's algorithmic visibility seems to be materialized, at least in the eyes of the end users examined in this study, as conspicuously invisible. This seemed to give rise to imaginaries about the algorithmic visibility regime that were considerably more complex than I anticipated. Essentially, they do not only refer to social relations between individuals, but to co-constitutive relations between imaginations of both human and non-human elements. The original conceptual framework was therefore extended to introduce the concept of sociomateriality, proposing that my participants' implicit understandings about who can visibilize whom on Facebook may be best understood as sociomaterial imaginaries. My analysis also revealed that interviewees did not seem to make decisions about their civic voice expressions based solely on their assumptions on how Facebook governs its algorithmic visibility regime. Instead, their descriptions repeatedly pointed to what I conceptualized as imagined others – which invited the assimilation of another concept that was not part of my initial conceptual framework: imagined audiences. These imagined others consisted of hybrid assumptions about Brazil's troubled democracy and Facebook's rules of visibility government. In conjunction with the platform's assumed rules of visibility, these imagined others were found to give rise to paradoxical norms about how to be heard as citizens on Facebook (a paradoxical civic imaginary), engendering what I depicted as a form of bottom-up authoritarianism. This was characterized as a structural misrecognition dynamic through which the interviewees seemed to both distort and invisibilise their own civic voices and denigrate those of others – the apparent cost of controlling their visibility so as to increase the likelihood of

being recognized on the platform. On this basis, I have suggested that authoritarianism on Facebook need not be produced by an external authority. It may emerge from the bottom up and for a reason that is, in principle, legitimate: to be heard.

As noted in the previous section, more research is needed to understand the generalizability of the insights arising from this thesis. Nevertheless, this analysis suggests that the consequences of datafication for democratic citizenship (particularly in Brazil) may be more subtle, but are not necessarily less damaging, than the literature on these ramifications usually propose.

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Appendix 1

Initial Interview Protocol.

"RQ1: In which terms, and to what extent, *are civic practices* adjusted by users to enact, resist and manipulate algorithmic visibility?

1) What do you think is needed to be more visible on social media when people are talking or doing things about this political crisis?

2) And you? What do you do when you want your posts or comments about this crisis to become more visible? Can you give me examples?

3) Are there some moments in whih you actually want to become less visible on social media? What do you do to hide? Can you show me examples?

4) Have you ever changed what you do or say about politics on social media during the crisis because you thought someone, some company or a government would see what you doing or saying? Can you show me examples?

5) Do you feel that there are things that you would like to do or say on social media, but cannot because the interface/system does not allow you?

6) Do you ever talk, read or interact with people that you disagree about the crisis on Facebook/Twitter? If so, how? Can you show me examples?
7) How did all this political participation during the crisis impacted on your offline relation to politics?

RQ2: How users develop *perceptions* about algorithmic visibility?

8) Thinking a bit about what we were talking about… how did discover that those are the ways to become more or less visible on social media? Can you tell me how did you learn these techniques?

9) How do you know who and what can see you? Can you tell me how did you learn this information?

10) Do you think that using social media is the best way to learn about how social media works, in the sense we have been talking about so far?

11) When you think about these things that you have to do to be more visible, or how you cannot do all the actions that you want on social media…. Is this way of doing or talking about politics close to what, in you opinion, politics should be like?

12) Based on what we have seen on your activity log, do you remember a moment during the crisis in which you felt that people were really respecting or disrespecting what you were saying or doing about this political crisis? How do you know people respected what you said/done? Can you show them to me?

13) Do you think that sometimes you are talking about politics, but no-one is listening? Why you think that happens? What do you feel about it?

14) Now, after all we talked about, and thinking about what we saw on you activity log…. I would like you to compare the person that you were before the crisis and after. Do you feel that using social media to talk about or do things about this crisis made you more or less capable to exert or claim you rights as a citizen? Can you explain me why?

15) Is there anything that you would like to say that I have not asked?"

Appendix 2

Final Interview Protocol.

"(INITIAL NARRATIVE QUESTION)

Could you explain how you participate politically on social media?

HOW USERS SEE

1- What does determine what you see on your social media news feed about politics?

2 - How did you discover this?

3 - What, if anything, do you do to change what you see in your newsfeed about politics? Could you elaborate on this?

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HOW USERS ARE SEEN (STRUGGLE FOR VISIBILITY)

4 – What does it make a post or a comment on politics on social media more visible?

5 - How did you discover this?

6 - What, if anything, do you do to increase the visibility of your posts/comments on politics on social media?

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HOW USERS ARE SEEN (SURVEILLANCE)

7 - Who can see your posts/comments on politics on social media?

8 - How did you discover this?

9 - Do you change your political activities on social media because these activities might be seen? Could you elaborate on this?

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CIVIC RECOGNITION

10 – When you talk about politics on social media, do you feel you are heard?

11 – Do you think people would hear you more if your posts/comments were more visible?

12 - How have your political activities on social media changed your offline life?"

Appendix 3

Cross tabulation of components of the conceptual framework and research/interview questions.

			COMPONENTS OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK			
			The schematization of the algorithmic visibility regime	**Social Imaginaries of algorithmic visibility regimes**	**The adjustment of civic voice to exert control over the algorithmic visibility regime**	
			RESEARCH QUESTIONS			
			Main RQ: How does Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime shape the civic voice of its ordinary end users on the platform?			
			SRQ 1: How do ordinary end users schematize Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime?	**SRQ 2: Which social imaginaries do ordinary end users hold of the Facebook's algorithmic visibility regime?**	**SRQ 3.1: Do ordinary end users' attempt to expand the visibility of their civic voice expressions on Facebook? If so, is this attempt associated with how they articulate these expressions?**	**SRQ 3.2: Do ordinary end users' attempt to reduce the visibility of their civic voice expressions on Facebook? If so, is this attempt associated with how they articulate these expressions?**
Possible Empirical Events	Seeing	**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**	How did you discover this [What does define what you see on your social media news feed about politics?]	*What does define what you see on your social media news feed about politics? *What, if anything, do you do to change what you see in your newsfeed about politics?	What, if anything, do you do to change what you see in your newsfeed about politics?	What, if anything, do you do to change what you see in your newsfeed about politics?
	Being Seen/Read (Invisibility)		How did you discover this [Who can see your posts/comments on politics on social media?]?	*Who can see your political activities on politics on social media? *Have you changed your political activities on social media because these activities might be seen?	**N/A**	Have you changed your political activities on social media because these activities might be seen?
	Being Seen/Read (Visibility)		How did you discover this [what makes your post/ comment on politics on social media more visible)?	*What does it make your political activities on social media more visible? *What, if anything, do you do to increase the visibility of your political activities on social media?	What, if anything, do you do to increase the visibility of your political activities on social media?	**N/A**
	Being Heard		**N/A**	**N/A**	* When you act politically on social media, do you feel you are heard? * Do you think people would hear you more if your political activities were more visible?	* When you act politically on social media, do you feel you are heard? *Do you think people would hear you more if your political activities were more visible?

Appendix 4

List of interviewees, with basic demographic information.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Race	Ideology	Occupation
Daniel	Male	55	White	Centre	Businessman
Lorenzo	Male	23	White	Centre	Retail clerk (unemployed)
Eneas	Male	36	White	Conservative	Small businessman
Rafael	Male	32	White	Conservative	Undergraduate student (law)
Vigo	Male	26	White	Conservative	Accountant (unemployed)
Alex	Male	51	White	Conservative	IT professional (unemployed)
Davi	Male	45	White	Conservative	English teacher
Luis	Male	62	White	Conservative	Pensioner
Fabricio	Male	21	Non-White	Conservative	Telemarketer
Antonio	Male	48	Non-White	Conservative	Real estate agent
Miguel	Male	21	White	Progressive	Undergraduate student (public policy)
Artur	Male	40	White	Progressive	Documentarist
Fabio	Male	40	White	Progressive	Manager in a tattoo shop
Theo	Male	25	White	Progressive	Lawyer
Vicente	Male	36	White	Progressive	Theatre teacher
Bernardo	Male	26	White	Progressive	Public employee
Adão	Male	35	White	Progressive	High-school teacher
Pedro	Male	33	White	Progressive	Publishing company employee
Gael	Male	37	White	Progressive	Graphic artist
Ulises	Male	52	White	Conservative	(did not say)
Humberto	Male	29	White	Progressive	Copy Editor
Alvaro	Male	27	White	Progressive	Private tutor

Victor	Male	35	White	Progressive	Clerk in cultural centre
Octavio	Male	38	Non-White	Progressive	Cultural producer
Cristian	Male	22	Non-White	Progressive	Undergraduate student (geography)
Nicolas	Male	34	Non-White	Progressive	Telemarketer
Benjamin	Male	23	Non-White	Progressive	Junior consultant
Laura	Female	24	White	Centre	Freelancing journalist
Kate	Female	24	Non-White	Centre	Freelancing journalist
Rosa	Female	22	Non-White	Centre	Nurse
Maria	Female	34	White	Conservative	Event organizer (unemployed)
Helena	Female	36	White	Conservative	Undergraduate student (law)
Ireni	Female	49	White	Progressive	Lawyer
Lucia	Female	27	White	Progressive	Actress
Fernanda	Female	36	White	Progressive	Engineer
Leticia	Female	40	White	Progressive	Psychologist
Olivia	Female	43	White	Progressive	Editor
Emilia	Female	40	White	Progressive	Real estate agent
Amanda	Female	41	White	Progressive	Video-maker
Telma	Female	28	White	Progressive	Musician (maternity leave)
Patricia	Female	42	Non-White	Progressive	Nurse
Manuela	Female	21	Non-White	Progressive	Architect
Ava	Female	32	Non-White	Progressive	Junior Marketer
Lorena	Female	30	Non-White	Progressive	Funk dancer
Joaquim	Female	32	Non-White	Progressive	Script writer
Julia	Female	25	Non-White	Progressive	Freelancing journalist

Appendix 5

Informed Consent Document (in Portuguese).

Termo de consentimento de participação em entrevista

Por meio deste documento, confirmo que aceito participar do projeto de pesquisa de doutorado conduzido por João Carlos Vieira Magalhães, aluno e pesquisador no departamento de Mídia e Comunicação da London School of Economics and Political Science. Eu entendo que o projeto objetiva coletar e analisar dados sobre a relação entre redes sociais e participação política durante a atual crise política brasileira. Meu consentimento é baseado nos seguintes termos.

1. Eu entendo que minha participação é voluntária e não serei pago para participar.

2. Eu entendo que que eu posso desistir da ou descontinuar minha participação a qualquer momento, sem que haja qualquer tipo de punição. Ninguém será informado se eu não quiser participar ou desistir de participar.

3. Eu entendo que a entrevista objetiva criar uma discussão interessante sobre o tópico da pesquisa. Se, no entanto, eu me sentir, por qualquer motivo, desconfortável durante a entrevista, eu tenho o direito de não responder a qualquer questão ou de terminar a entrevista sem precisar apresentar nenhuma justificativa.

4. Eu entendo que a minha participação se dará por meio de uma entrevista pessoal de cerca de uma hora com João Carlos Vieira Magalhães. Entendo que notas poderão ser tomadas durante a entrevista e que a entrevista será gravada. Entendo que, se eu não quiser ser gravado, não poderei participar.

5. Eu entendo que João Carlos Vieira Magalhães não me identificará pelo meu nome próprio em nenhum relatório ou texto criado a partir dessa entrevista e que a confidencialidade das minhas declarações e dados será garantida por ele. Eventuais usos subsequentes dos dados coletados nessa entrevista serão sujeitos a políticas padrões para assegurar minha anonimidade.

6. Entendo que ninguém, exceto João Carlos Vieira Magalhães, terá acesso às notas e à transcrição bruta dessa entrevista. Essa precaução assegurará que meus comentários não gerem repercussões negativas para mim.

7. Eu entendo que essa pesquisa foi avaliada e aprovada pelas supervisoras do doutorado de João Carlos Vieira Magalhães na London School of Economics and Political Science, Dr. Alison Powell e Prof. Robin Mansell, sem ter sido necessário passar pela Comissão de Ética da universidade. Entendo também que sou livre para contatar, por qualquer motivo, essa mesma comissão por meio de Lyn Grove (research.ethics@lse.ac.uk).

8. Confirmo que li e entendi as explicações dadas a mim sobre a pesquisa, que tive todas as minhas questões respondidas de maneira satisfatória e que minha decisão de participar voluntariamente desse estudo é resultado dessa compreensão.

9. Confirmo que recebi uma cópia desse termo de consentimento.

Appendix 6

Translation of the basic text enclosed in Figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3.

“Do you talk about politics in social networks? Not affiliated with any party or social movements? Send a message to this page and get interviewed!

My name is João Carlos Magalhães, I am a journalist and researcher at The London School of Economics and Political Science - LSE. I look for people to be interviewed for about an hour about how they use social media to do and talk about politics. The result of the interviews will be used for my doctorate.

Interested? Send a * message * to this page (it only takes a few seconds) or an email to j.c.vieira-magalhaes@lse.ac.uk.

If you want to know more about my research, check out my profile on the university's website: http://www.lse.ac.uk/…/PhdResear…/Joao-Carlos-Magalhaes.aspx”

Appendix 7

Table summarizing the empirical findings and conceptual insights of the thesis, linking them to their respective concepts and indicating their location in the thesis.

Main Concepts (Chapter 3)	Empirical Findings				Conceptual Insights (Chapter 9)
	Chapter	Section	Main Themes (correspond to main sections of the chapters)	Specific Themes (correspond to sub sections of the chapters)	
Schematization (Sections 3.3 and 3.6.3)	5	5.2	Responses	Accurate Responses Inaccurate Responses	Conspicuous Invisibility (Section 9.2)
		5.3	Information	Traditional Media Information Platform Information Social Interaction	
		5.4	Probing Actions	Improvised Survey Improvised Algorithm Audit	
Social Imaginaries (Sections 3.3 and 3.6.3)	6	6.2	Controllable Visibility Imaginary	Control Tool Visual Boundary-Making Compliance End Users-Centred Order	Sociomaterial Imaginary + Imagined Other (Section 9.3)
		6.3	Predictive Visibility Imaginary	Eavesdropping Automated Placement Wish Prediction Data-Centred Order	
		6.4	Uncontrollable Visibility Imaginary	Exploitation Political Censorship No Entanglement End User-Excluding Order	
Visibility Expansion Projects / Civic Voice (Sections 3.3, 3.4 and 3.6.3)	7	7.2	Control of Non-Civic Voice Elements	Piggybacking Network Expansion Voice Multiplication Tactical Self-Interactions Temporal Control	Prefiguration Cycle (*Analytical level*) (Section 9.4) + Bottom up authoritarianism (*Normative Level*) (Section 9.5)
		7.3	Control of Civic Voice Expressions	Tactical Aggressions Simplification Visual Provocations News Association	
		7.4	Reasons for no project	Useless Unethical Dangerous	
Visibility Reduction Projects / Civic Voice (Sections 3.3, 3.4 and 3.6.3)	8	8.2	Control of Non-Civic Voice Elements	(Re)categorization of Others Space Shifts Tactical Delays	
		8.3	Control of Civic Voice Expressions	Misleading Profiles Voice Disguising Voice Correction Voice Deletion Voice Suppression Voice Disappearance	
		8.4	Reasons for no project	Unnecessary Unacceptable	