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9

ALGORITHMIC ENCLAVES

Affective Politics and Algorithms in the Neoliberal Social Media Landscape

Merlyna Lim

Does social media threaten democracy? Is social media killing democracy? Are social media algorithms bad for democracy? Such questions have appeared in the titles and headlines of many journalistic and scholarly essays.[1] In the last several years, social media, and their algorithms in particular, have indeed been blamed for weakening democracy, including facilitating the victory of Trump in the United States (Grassegger & Krogerus, 2017; Rosenberg, Confessore, & Cadwalladr, 2018) and the Brexit campaign in the United Kingdom (Scott, 2018). Some media observers believe that by their exploitation of access to big personal data and manipulation of the algorithms (Dalli, 2018; Saunders, 2018; Summers, 2018), social media platforms have created "a global crisis of democracy" (Ferguson, 2018, para. 14). Undeniably, social media platforms have become embedded in everyday practices of communication, community making, and information sharing in various topics; politics is not an exception. Social media algorithms, as the engine of sorting and filtering information, are indeed central to these practices. However, social media algorithms (and algorithms in general) should not be depicted as a modern myth—powerful entities that "rule the world" (Hickman, 2013) by sorting, governing, shaping, and even controlling our everyday lives.

Certainly, scholarly debates on the role of social media algorithms in politics paint more shades than this oversimplified depiction; most accept that within the social media landscape there is an ongoing pull-and-push dynamic between technological constraints and individual choices and decisions. Recent studies on the relationship between politics and social media reflect *an algorithmic turn*, namely a paradigm shift that occurred in the early 2010s as social science and humanities scholars turned their attention to (roles and implications of) algorithms as a means to understand social processes.[2] These studies largely revolve

around social and technical properties of technology, especially algorithms, and how these impact users' interactions and the nature of political conversations. Scholars have identified various problems embedded in social media and their algorithms such as: exacerbating the polarization of society via echo chambers and "filter bubbles" (Spohr, 2017; Sunstein, 2018); facilitating the spread of mis- and disinformation and amplifying populist and extremist voices (Govil & Baishya, 2018; Marwick & Lewis, 2017); and assisting the proliferation of hate speech and racist/discriminatory messages (Cleland, 2014; Morris-Suzuki, 2013; Yamaguchi, 2013). All of these works recognize the role of individuals, in varying degrees, both explicitly and implicitly. However, by focussing their analysis on the role and impact of social media and/or algorithms on politics, the focal point of their analysis is the technology itself.

In response, some scholars believe that while social media perpetuate personalization of news, the perceived effect of filter bubbles and/or echo chambers is greater than it really is (Dubois & Blank, 2018; Zimmer et al., 2019; Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2016). These scholars recognize the role and impact of algorithms, but also emphasize the importance of users' information-seeking behaviour in the interaction between human users and social media platforms. My chapter, positioned along this line of thinking, attempts to contribute to as well as intervene in these debates and, further, to offer an alternative conceptual framework that captures the complexity and dynamic of the relationship between people and technology. In my attempt to do it, I see the need to decentre the focus of analysis from the "impact" and/or "role" of algorithms and instead emphasize the "relationship" between social media algorithms and human users, and pay more attention to the role of human agency. In my intervention and analysis, I specifically employ affect as a central element of analysis to unpack the complexity of the algorithmic environment of social media. In establishing my framework, I anchor my analysis in three accounts. First, by exploring affect as the currency of the neoliberal media landscape to contextualize its role and prominence in the social media landscape. Second, by examining the logic and principles of social media "sorting" algorithms and their implications for the formation of discourses. And, lastly, by considering "algorithmic enclaves" (Lim, 2017) as a concept that can possibly explain the emergence of affective political clusters that take place in social media.

Affect as the Currency of the Neoliberal Media Landscape

As neoliberalism is a semiotically loose and broad term, it is helpful to quote Harvey (2005: 2), who defines it as

> a theory of political economic practices that proposes mankind is best served by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills, characterized by free trade, strong private property rights and the free market, within an institutional framework created and preserved by the state.

For the purpose of this chapter, I also concur with Brown (2015) that neoliberalism designates something very specific; it is a distinctive kind of valourization and liberation of capital by making economics the model of everything. Neoliberalism economizes not only socio-economic arrangements, but also culture and politics in general, and democracy in particular. By economizing, neoliberalism is both a drive towards marketization and, moreover, a drive toward the economization of the ensemble of social relations (Adaman & Madra, 2014). In other words, neoliberalism allows the extension of market economic principles into all areas of life while authorizing the state's powers to discipline and coerce individuals into "productive" socio-economic activities (Tansel, 2018). While "productivity" and "economization" are commonly perceived as rational practices—as neoliberal projects always frame themselves in terms of rationality—scholars argue that affects are important and central to neoliberal processes (Anderson, 2016). Anderson (2016: 735) argues that "collective affects are part of sites, networks, and flows of neoliberalism." Following Anderson (2014: 735), I use affect as an "umbrella category that encompasses qualitatively distinct ways of organizing the feeling of existence."

In *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild (1983) argues that feeling is a mechanism through which we know what is due to one another; further, it occupies a central role of a functioning capitalist framework. Neoliberal landscape—media landscape in particular—is characterized by a level of symbolic production that not only results in a dematerialization of labour, but also increasingly relies on highly emotional components. Feelings (e.g., love, hate, sadness, anger) are integral to neoliberal processes. From "positive thinking" and "self-esteem" movements (Ehrenreich, 2010) to the "happiness industries" (Davies, 2015), affective stimulations are a central part of the psychic operation of neoliberalism (Gill & Kanai, 2018; Scharff, 2016). These stimulations, along with discipline and regulation, are produced, reproduced, circulated, and distributed through media within "neoliberal logics mandating personal transformation" (Gill & Kanai, 2018: 318). I concur with Gill and Kanai (2018) that what takes place in the contemporary media landscape is not simply the commercialization of feeling, but a new era of "emotional capitalism"—a dual process by which emotional and economic relationships come to define and shape each other (Illouz, 2007).

Social media, especially in their early years, were framed as alternative and revolutionary. While many continue to view them as democratic, I argue that social media, which include heavily commercialized media and social networking communities such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram, are very much part of the contemporary media landscape where practices of emotional capitalism take place and are even intensified. Marwick (2013), in her analysis of status-building techniques on social media—such as self-branding, micro-celebrity, and life-streaming—argues that social media represent a neoliberal technology that encourages people to apply free-market principles to the organization of social life. Marwick (2013) suggests that "authenticity"

and "being yourself" have become marketing strategies that are embedded in the scripts of social media technologies that necessitate "instrumental emotional labour" (p. 17).

Emotions are not static by simply being situated in the individual but they move between bodies. Scholars of the model of emotional contagion argue that emotions can be transmitted through mimicry and synchronization of bodily expressions (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993) and shared across individuals in many different ways both implicitly and explicitly. Advancing this model, in her model of sociality of emotion, Sara Ahmed (2004: 10) suggests that "emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place." Here, emotions are not simply about what I or we feel. Emotions are also through which "we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others" (Ahmed, 2004: 10).

In the social media environment, physical bodies are not in contact with each other. However, online activities taking place in this environment—such as liking, sharing, posting, and commenting—are largely driven by emotion. These activities, arguably, are a form of "human contact" where the emotion is passed from one to another. In other words, in social media networks the production and management of affect is a constant feature that connects one user with another. Communication networks conceived here are not simply in terms of linked social media accounts but as networks that are constitutively affective. Through their usage of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and other social media technologies, individuals produce and circulate affect, creating voluminous affective networks of communication. Affect is manufactured and accumulated from reciprocal and circular communication, from *la communication pour la communication* entailing the act of posting and re-posting, sharing and re-sharing, commenting and re-commenting, friending and unfriending, and, ultimately, expressing the feeling through like or love (or sad, angry, and wow) buttons, emoticons, and gifs. In a neoliberal social media landscape, affect is the currency, representing a medium of exchange or an intermediary instrument used to facilitate human transactions, between individuals and groups.

Social Media "Sorting" Algorithms, Affective Interactions, and Superlative Biases

Social networking platforms existed for years without automated content filtering algorithms. For example, in the "old" Facebook, prior to the introduction of the news feed, logging in to Facebook would solely access your own profile page, but others' pages were only viewable by manually searching for those profiles. When Facebook introduced the news feeds and status updates in September 2006, contents were chronologically curated; thus, what you posted was what was visible to your "friends." The interaction between users took

place only if users commented on a status or post of other users. Facebook began experimenting with an algorithm[3] in November 2007 when it added the "like" button and "X out" (remove) features which simplified ways of interacting with others' posts. This algorithm transformed the news feed to adapt to what you "like" and what you "X out," and, therefore, highlights posts that Facebook thought would interest the individual users.

From 2007 onward, the population of social media users grew exponentially. With the rapid growth of users, user feeds were packed with more content than ever. Thus, social media algorithms, such as what was introduced by Facebook in 2007, were initially developed to accommodate the growth of users. Social media algorithms were supposed to make it "easier" for people to see updates from the accounts they actually "care" about, or, in other words, to facilitate affective interactions between users. However, as the social media population grew and, consequently, became "where the market is" or the site for corporations to market their products to potential consumers, the platform started to cater its technical arrangements around what the corporation needed. Hence, there grew the need to become algorithmic. Historically, marketers and advertisers on social media struggled to organically reach their target audience. In recent years, however, social media algorithms are increasingly able to cater to this need and, subsequently, push brands to pay for social media ads.

In January 2016, Facebook introduced the audience optimization tool, which allows brand marketers and advertisers to set preferences to target a specific audience based on demographics, interests, and geographical location. Using this organic audience optimization algorithm, brands can organically reach their intended audience and track how well their ads perform. Similarly, in March 2016, Instagram switched from displaying content chronologically to using a sorting algorithm to exhibit posts. This algorithm would put the "best" posts first; ones that are determined to be the most relevant or most interesting for a user. The introduction of this algorithm marked the beginning of the popularity of Instagram for marketing the brands. Meanwhile, Twitter, which continues to display a live and real-time timeline, in 2016 also started to include sections with ranked tweets and tweets Twitter thinks would be relevant to users. Beyond the year of 2016, algorithms continue to be modified and developed around targeted advertisement. The more algorithms furnish the need of the brands to more effectively reach their targeted consumers, the more likely companies are to turn to social media for their paid ads.

What does a social media algorithm look like? There are many factors accounted for in the algorithms. But, essentially, their underpinning typology is a sorting algorithm, which is an algorithm that puts elements of a list in a certain order, such as numerical order or lexicographical order. The combination of the sorting algorithm principle and its focus on targeted advertisement resulted in an algorithm that is biased towards the superlative. As this sorting principle is applied to everyday interaction among social media users and

content that is circulated among users, content that has superlative values is more likely to be pushed up in the hierarchy of importance. It moves to the top of the page, the front page, and has the highest visibility. The sorting principle pushes the "best" content to the top, to be most visible. Of course, the "best," here, has little to do with the quality. As mentioned earlier, this is the content determined to be the most relevant or most interesting for the user. Once the content interacts with users, the best—that which makes it to the top or to be more visible than other content—is that which can accrue the highest amount of affection quantified from the number of comments, shares, likes, and loves. In the affective networks, on one hand social media algorithms help in pushing content with superlative values to the top, to be more likely to be the most commented, the most shared, the most liked, and the most loved. On the other hand, users of these networks, especially the highly motivated and most engaged users, through their actions toward content that is relevant to them (as prescribed by algorithms), help the same content to be more popular.

In my research on social media activism in Indonesia (Lim, 2013), I found that, in general, social-media-based mobilization increases its chance of being successful when it embraces the principles of the contemporary culture of consumption in a neoliberal landscape. These principles include:

> *light package* (content that can be enjoyed without spending too much time, can be understood without deep reflection, and usually has a hype-based component), *headline appetite* (a condition where information is condensed to accommodate a short attention span and one-liner conversations) and *trailer vision* (an oversimplified, hyped and sensationalised story rather than a substantial one or the oversimplified representation of actual information).
>
> *(Lim, 2013: 638)*

Only "simple or simplified narratives that are associated with low-risk activism and are congruent with ideological meta-narratives have much higher chance of going viral and generate significant activism" (p. 651).

In explaining why political activism in social media needs to be couched in simplified terms that resonate with terms of popular culture, I point out that the social media landscape epitomizes "the most extreme example of an overall acceleration of production and circulation of information" where "a user is part of multiple, hyper-connected 'communities' which constantly produce and consume" (Lim, 2013: 651). Hence, "the escalation of velocity and size of information combined with the rapidity and briefness of interaction make social media more hospitable to simple and/or simplified narratives than complex/complicated ones" (Lim, 2013: 651). This condition, in combination with the application of sorting algorithm principles and the ascendancy of

affective interactions, may explain how we are more likely to see superlative, "extreme" content—such as the cutest cat and the most racist tweet—in our timeline rather than any content that is in the "middle," such as those that are moderate, nuanced, mundane, complex, etc. In other words, algorithmic processes scale up and amplify the circulation of affect, which is the currency of the neoliberal social media landscape, especially extreme affect, and accelerate human transactions associated with it.

Algorithmic Enclaves, the Binary Discourse, and Affective Political Clusters

What is the consequence of social media sorting algorithms for how we connect and collectivize with each other and in the formation of political communities? The most dominant hypothesis is that social media algorithms produce filter bubbles that segregate and polarize users into ideological echo chambers. The segregation into "echo chambers" is cast as being responsible for recent populist insurgencies in the Western world, especially in the Brexit referendum and the rise of Donald Trump (Chater, 2016; Hooton, 2016). Further, journalists and pundits assume that radical communities, such as hate groups, white supremacy, and other right-wing groups, are made by "bad" social media algorithms (Grassegger & Krogerus, 2017; Rosenberg, Confessore, & Cadwalladr, 2018; Scott, 2018).

As may be expected, scholarly debates on social media and the rise of populist communities bring out less simplified insights than what are portrayed in the media, with some revealing more nuances than others. The majority of studies argue that social media platforms and their algorithms have emboldened the growth of nationalist and right-wing populist rhetoric or, in Khosravinik's (2017) words, "social media has created a fertile space of growth of populist politics or haphazard populism in every sense" (p. 66). In a study of alt-right groups, Daniels (2018) argues that algorithms enable and amplify racist conversations in social media, suggesting that racism is not a "bug" but, rather, a "feature" of the system. Along this line, some scholars suggest that social media assist the proliferation of hate speech and racist/discriminatory messages (Cleland, Anderson, & Aldridge-Deacon, 2018) and facilitate the spread of mis- and disinformation and amplify the populist and extremist voices (Engesser et al., 2017; Govil & Baishya, 2018; Marwick & Lewis, 2017). In studying the rise of populism in Europe and the United States, some authors emphasize the role of algorithms in exacerbating the polarization of society and, thus, enabling the formation of right-wing populist communities (Müller et al., 2017; Wirz et al., 2018), particularly through the notions of "echo chambers" or "filter bubbles" (Del Vicario et al., 2017; Gorodnichenko et al., 2018; Spohr, 2017).

Meanwhile, a number of scholars put forward more nuanced arguments calling for the contextualization of research on social media and populism within socio-economic and political conditions (Fuchs, 2019), where populism

emerges not only as a reaction to a failed neoliberal system (Gerbaudo, 2018) but also as an effect of identitarian and existential struggles (Postill, 2018). My contribution does not speak directly to the relationship between social media and populism. Rather, by delving into social media users–algorithms dynamics in the affective neoliberal landscape, I offer an explanation that may help us understand why social media exhibits a populist bias.

Echo chambers and filter bubbles are two metaphorical expressions, usually used in tandem or interchangeably to explain how online communication has led to a narrow information diet, where individuals only access information and ideas by those with like-minded beliefs. They, however, denote different meanings. An echo chamber, according to Dubois and Blank (2018), "describes a situation where only certain ideas, information and beliefs are shared" where people "only encounter things they already agree with" (p. 729). A filter bubble refers to a state of intellectual isolation that allegedly results from algorithm-driven personalized searches which lead a user to select media and content that reinforces their existing preferences (Pariser, 2011). While they are closely related, echo chamber refers to human information behaviour while filter bubble refers more to algorithmic effect. Rooted in the concept of homophily, the tendency of individuals to associate and bond with similar others (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001), both echo chambers and filter bubbles assume that algorithmic dynamics facilitate the formation of communities based on similarities, especially in belief systems and/or ideologies.

My observation of communities on social media platforms among Malaysian, Indonesian, and Filipino users on Facebook, to a certain degree, reveals the homophilic tendency. However, it does not mean that users always consciously seek to be associated with others who share similar preferences. Users from these countries typically have a very large and diverse network of contacts, often above 1,000 "friends" (contacts). Many casually add "friends" of their "friends" to become their own "friends." Typically, users are associated with each other not based on political preferences and/or ideologies but based on other types of association, such as physical location, local language, education backgrounds (going to the same high school/university), hobbies, social roles (i.e., mothers), or simply by sharing mutual contacts. Ideological homophily is not an archetypal basis for the construction of affective networks. Rather, they emerge simply because users are connected to each other and are maintained through circular and reflexive affective gestures such as commenting, sharing, liking, etc. Such diverse networks increase the likelihood of users' exposure to varied political information and discussions, beyond those that are aligned with their political preferences or ideologies. Observably, social media algorithms do not necessarily create filter bubbles that push everybody into echo chambers. This does not mean that echo chambers do not exist in social media. Rather, it is that social media algorithms do not create an environment where all users are equally inclined to form echo chambers. In other words, the effect of

social media algorithms on individuals is not homogeneous; it is diverse. I also observe that the propensity for the formation of echo chambers on social media is varied based on the nature of differing discourse and their socio-political contexts.

Here, I offer an analytical framework that captures the complexity and dynamics of the relationship between social media algorithms and human users by considering a mutual shaping of technology and people. I propose "algorithmic enclave," an alternative concept that recognizes both the active shaping of social media algorithms and the active role of users. I define "algorithmic enclave" as a discursive arena where individuals, afforded by their constant interactions with algorithms, interact with each other and collectivize based on a perceived shared identity online for defending their beliefs and protecting their resources from both real and perceived threats, usually from a common enemy (Lim, 2017: 422). I use the term algorithmic to denote the importance of algorithmic processes in the formation of the cluster and the term enclave to highlight the agency of human users. Unlike a ghetto, which is formed as the result of the involuntary "segregation of a group that stands in a subordinate political and social relationship to its surrounding society" (Marcuse, 1997: 228), the formation of an enclave is voluntary in nature. The enclave denotes a type of clustering that is voluntarily developed by a group for purposes of promoting the welfare and interests of its members (Marcuse, 1997). In other words, members of a certain enclave do have agency and play a role in the formation of their own enclave.

To illustrate how algorithmic enclaves may be formed, I present a snapshot from my study of the 2017 Jakarta Gubernatorial Election in Jakarta, Indonesia (Lim, 2017). The campaign preceding the election revolved around two camps, the supporters of the incumbent, Governor Basuki Tjahja Purnama (known as Ahok) who is also a Chinese-Indonesian and Christian minority, and those who were against him who eventually rallied behind Ahok's main opponent, Anies Baswedan (popularly called Anies). The rivalry was essentially played between pro-Ahok and anti-Ahok camps. During the campaign, I discovered that "both sides engaged in post-truth politics, framing information and stories by appealing to emotions with very little or no regard to any policy details and objective facts" (Lim, 2017: 417). Both sides created and maintained websites that provided one-sided information, recruited volunteers, employed paid buzzers,[4] and utilized micro-celebrities[5]—all of them operating in tandem with social media-targeted advertising in an attempt to reach and influence their targeted voters largely by deploying affect manipulation tactics. Disinformation, misinformation, and propaganda were circulated to appeal to love or hate, trust or disgust, fear or hatred—extreme and oppositional forms of affect that were well catered for by social media algorithms.

What is more interesting than the deployment of post-truth websites, buzzers, and micro-celebrities is the collective behaviour of social media users who belonged to these two camps. As discussed earlier, Indonesian social media

users, due to the nature of their social networks, are more likely to expose themselves to diverse political information. In the case of this gubernatorial election campaign, however, the politics were strictly binary. It was either you were with Ahok or not. In this election campaign, Ahok supporters framed themselves as nationalists and pluralists, and framed their opponents un-Indonesian, Arabized, radical Islamists, intolerants, and even terrorists. Meanwhile the anti-Ahok camp labelled the other camp anti-Islam and infidels. My study revealed that pro- and anti-Ahok social media users were not necessarily clustered into segregated echo chambers just because social media algorithms divided them into filter bubbles. They, in fact, were connected to each other socially and, to a certain degree, were exposed to opposing viewpoints. For them, however, disagreeable information and discussions just perpetuated extreme affect—either their love or hate—for Ahok, and, therefore, intensified the antagonistic relationship they cultivated with their opponents. This observation confirms previous studies which show that polarized clusters in social media are formed through both confirmation as well as contradiction of opinions and information (Törnberg & Wahlström, 2018). Further, within these enclaves, there was overlapped content being disseminated, sometimes originating from mainstream media and/or alternative media such as blogs. Yet, responses to the same content were contradictory. This shows that, unlike what filter bubbles represent, polarized enclaves do not necessarily isolate themselves from each other. Rather than being insular, these enclaves are interconnected with each other and with media sources of all kinds.

In forming a sense of cohesion within the enclave, affect plays a central role. While pundits and media observers too quickly simplified the contestation as the war between liberal and Islam fundamentalist values (Budiari, 2016; Tapsell, 2017; Varagur, 2017), my research shows that association and consensus among members within the same group were generally formed based on extreme affect, a certain "strong feeling" that unified them, rather than ideological differences and their associated values. I observed that some users maintained their Facebook "friendships" with users from the opposing camp just to track materials that confirmed their "feeling." The hate and the love were the main binding ingredients in the formation of these algorithmic enclaves. An anti-Ahok enclave could be formed not because all users hold the same ideology (e.g., not all anti-Ahok members were Islam fundamentalists), but simply because all of them harbour hate or dislike for Ahok, either simply for his race and his religion, or for a more complex reason such as his policies. Also, while there were pluralist and human rights activists among members of the pro-Ahok group, a pro-Ahok enclave was largely formed around Ahok persona where members were essentially fans of Ahok. Many voters of the 2017 Jakarta Gubernatorial Election did not belong to either enclave. Their voices, however, were not visible in social media as they thought they were in the

minority and feared offending others or of being bullied. The aggressiveness and dominance of the anti and pro enclaves diminished the plurality of voices.

Beyond the Ahok case, in the Indonesian social media landscape such antagonistic algorithmic enclaves were also formed in the contestation between supporters and detractors (or colloquially called fans and haters) of the president Joko Widodo during the 2014 and 2019 Presidential Elections as well as throughout his presidency. Similarly, in the Philippines, algorithmic enclaves were formed among President Duterte's supporters and adversaries and/or Filipinos who are anti or pro Duterte's "War on Drugs" (Ong & Cabanes, 2018; Sombatpoonsiri, 2018). Such a dynamic is also found in Malaysia, where social media users were divided between those who were pro- and anti-Bersih electoral reform movement (Lim, 2017), and in Thailand, where Thais were heavily polarized around their strong feeling towards the monarchy and divided into red shirts and yellow shirts enclaves (Sombatpoonsiri, 2018). Beyond Southeast Asia, similar dynamics are found in social media conversations around issues that represent binary discourse, such as Brexit, Donald Trump, and (anti)immigration in Europe.

Here, the term binary discourse describes a type of discourse where practices of interaction and communication of the main issue and any relevant issues around it can be best or only expressed as a binary on a single axis either X or anti-X, where issue propagators are clustered around X or anti-X and are attempting to attract supporters based on that single axis. Such binary discourse commonly stems from the binary political system, where people's choices are essentially limited to two dominant coalitions or parties or the ruling party/coalition and its opposition. As discussed earlier, algorithmic processes in the neoliberal social media landscape accelerate human transactions associated with extreme affect. Social media, therefore, provides a fertile space for binary political discourse—which typically revolves around us versus them, our opinion versus their opinion, and pro versus anti—to thrive.

The enclaves with a binary discourse underpinning are largely affective communities. Affective feedback loops, which can be defined as "the mechanism by which affect circulates from the user, into the algorithmically determined product, which returns desired content back to the user" (Boler & Davis, 2018: 76), are central in their formation and sustenance. In these enclaves, indeed, the role of technology as "mediator" and technology as actual "interlocutor," as well as "the boundaries of self, technology and other(s) that make up digital interaction and produce active response" are blurred (Boler & Davis, 2018: 76).

Algorithmic Enclave: What It Is and What It Is Not

How do algorithmic enclaves differ from echo chambers and filter bubbles? The term filter bubbles points to the instrumentality of algorithms and, to a certain degree, presumes a centrality of algorithms' techno-agency and,

consequently, a relatively subordinate role of the human users. I suggest that the algorithm itself does not pre-program or encode the formation of enclaves. In the neoliberal social media landscape, human users and algorithms mutually shape and reshape each other in the sorting, classifying, and hierarchizing of individuals and contents, notably based on affect, and, therefore, they collectively shape the formation of algorithmic enclaves and the discourse that takes place within these enclaves. Further, while social media algorithms provide technological affordance for the formation of enclaves, human users are the active agents that continuously shape how these enclaves might be formed and sustained. The partitioned environment of algorithmic enclaves is dynamic, not static (as implied by "bubbles"); clusters shift in size and membership over time.

Meanwhile, algorithmic enclave as a concept does not negate the existence of echo chambers. Some enclaves can indeed reflect the characteristics of echo chambers—where isolated groups are formed based on similarities. Rather, algorithmic enclave recognizes the centrality of affect as the currency of human transactions; these transactions are both voluntarily acted by human users and facilitated by algorithms. In other words, the algorithmic dynamics facilitate the formation of communities not simply based on similarities—as assumed in echo chambers—but largely based on recurrent affective transactions.

Scholars have explored how digital media facilitate the emergence of new social groupings, which have been variably termed "networked movements" (Juris, 2004), "networked individualism" (Rainie & Wellman, 2012), "connective action" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013), or "virtual neighbourhood" (Appadurai, 1996). How does algorithmic enclave differ from any of these concepts?

These analyses are important in revealing how individuals organize themselves in the social media age. They bring in network, connectivity, and virtuality as significant features of human interactions in the digital milieu. As demonstrated in a previous section, algorithmic enclave offers a more explicit analysis that takes social media not just as "structural metaphors" or "a backdrop of human interactions" (Milan, 2015) by taking algorithmic dynamics into account. It is also a response to Stefania Milan's (2015) calls for analyses that combine both the consequences and affordances of the infrastructure, or the politics of platforms (Gillespie, 2010), as well as active human dynamics as they utilize the platforms.

In reference to and in line with Bennet and Segerberg's (2013) "connective action," algorithmic enclave recognizes the personalization and individualization of politics and collective actions facilitated by social media. However, beyond that, it also considers social media algorithms as both techno-social and cultural-ideological agents that shape and are shaped by human users (Milan, 2015). Further, while recognizing the importance of connectivity, in the concept of algorithmic enclave I also inscribe the importance of collective identity. While connective actions may seem to precede the formation of online

collective actions, the connectivity itself may be rooted in an entrenched collective identity that is societally constructed and affective in nature.

Is algorithmic enclave counterpublic? When they emerge as alternative discursive arenas, algorithmic enclaves can be conceptually viewed in parallel to counterpublics, a concept that has been central to the feminist critiques of the mainstream public sphere theory, and denotes the alternative publics that are formed as a response to various exclusions by the dominant publics (Felski, 1989; Fraser, 1990). The existence of counterpublics has traditionally been understood as empowering; it better promotes the ideal of participatory parity (Felski, 1989) as it offers the possibility for the subaltern, historically marginalized communities to challenge dominant public discourses (Fraser, 1990). However, recent studies on the rise of various regressive groups on social media platforms reveal that counterpublics are not always progressive (see: Gotell & Dutton, 2016; Massanari, 2017). Further, unlike counterpublics, algorithmic enclaves do not always position themselves against the dominant public sphere. This chapter shows that social media algorithms, as they operate in an affective neoliberal landscape, make it increasingly difficult for historically marginalized groups to form counterpublics (see also: Massanari, 2017; Prasad, 2016; Schradie, 2019). Instead, they privilege the privileged, who may perceive themselves as being excluded from the mainstream publics, to form an algorithmic enclave, an exclusive discursive arena that often silences and even antagonizes the voices of truly marginalized communities. These algorithmic enclaves, as exemplified in my empirical snapshot, may emerge as dominant binary discursive arenas where enclave members produce and circulate positive affect with each other while projecting antagonistic feelings or negative affect for "the Others."

Conclusions

Social media are very much part of the contemporary media landscape where practices of emotional capitalism are pursued, intensified, and even amplified. As such, communication networks conceived in social media are constitutively affective as individual users associate and interact with each other by producing and circulating affect. In these affective networks, social media algorithms are largely designed to enhance targeted advertisement and are built on sorting principles; such a combination pushes them to be biased towards the superlative, notably content that generates extreme binary affective gestures, such as love or hate. The neoliberal social media landscape, affective networks, and social media algorithms together assemble a habitat that privileges and encourages the emergence of political clusters that resort to binary affective rhetorics. In a political condition where polarizing binary politics and/or binary discourse are entrenched, affective political enclaves—especially those that are based on extreme emotions such as hate and love—are more likely to emerge on social

media. Each of these enclaves is an algorithmic enclave, a discursive arena where individuals, afforded by social media algorithms, voluntarily form an affective political cluster that is exclusively developed to promote the well-being, rights, and interests of their own, while negating the rights of "the Others."

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Notes

1 For examples see: *Economist* (2017), Howard (2016), and Sunstein (2018).
2 My usage of the term here reflects an intellectual shift instead of a technological shift suggested by earlier usages. Uricchio (2011) uses the term in visual culture to describe how technological applications that rely on algorithmically defined relations such as Photosynth bring a regime change in image and visual representation. Meanwhile, Gurumurthy and Bharthur (2018: 1) define it as "central and strategic role data processing and automated reasoning [or] basically, deployment of digital intelligence tactics".
3 An algorithm is a finite set of rules or instructions defining a sequence of operations for solving a particular problem. In this chapter, the term algorithm is used in the context of computer programs running on machines.
4 Buzzer is a term that describes a social media user "who is paid by a company to disseminate promotional information of a certain product or brand on social media sites" (Lim, 2017: 417).
5 Micro-celebrities are social media users who behave like brands; they build their own equality, choreograph their own image and ensure that their online presence is in line with their image (Tufekci, 2013). They invest considerable time in managing their profile, ensuring that their postings and comments are well aligned with their overall brand image.

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