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## DO ALGORITHMS HAVE COSMOPOLITICS? A DISCUSSION BASED ON FACEBOOK'S NUDITY POLICY

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Sociotechnical mediators that have an increasingly influence in digital platforms, the algorithms construct and implement regimes of power and knowledge (Kitchin, 2014). Although there is a strong institutional effort held by Facebook and other platforms to present them as “reliable sociotechnical actors” (Gillespie, 2014), frequent controversies around the agencies of the algorithms have been highlighting the importance of discussing their ethical and political implications. In this context, it seems pertinent to remember an issue - and a provocation - pointed by Langdon Winner (1986). By asking “Do the artifacts have politics?”, this author calls for attention to the specific forms of power and authority incorporated by technological innovations. Dialoguing with this perspective, Introna (2016, p.18) points that the algorithms “more or less enact important value choices, made implicitly or explicitly, by those who build them and implement them, which may have significant implications for those that draw upon them in their daily practices”.

One of the most evident examples of regimes of power and normatization delegated to algorithms are the restrictions of the circulation of images that contain some trace of nudity (feminine in particular) on Facebook. According to Gibbs (2016), “Facebook says it uses both automated systems and human reviewers before taking action,” but, at Community Standards’ page, the platform says that “it is essential that we have policies in place that our global teams can apply **uniformly** and **easily** when reviewing content” (our highlights), which suggests at least a normatization of the process. The reason for that is because “some audiences within our global community may be sensitive to this type of content - particularly because of their cultural background or age”.

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The idea of "global community" evoked by Facebook reminds us of the differentiation between cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitics presented by Latour (2004). To point out the crisis of eurocentric mononaturalism, the author brings up the thoughts of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, anthropologist on the amerindian perspectivism. Unlike Westerners, for whom the body is something given, for amerindians all living beings have souls, but not necessarily bodies. To denature the body, thus, is pointed out as a way of recognizing other cosmopolitics, outweighing a cosmopolitanism that appeases differences and disputes.

Two cases held in 2016 allow us to discuss the cosmopolitical nuances of algorithms' agency and the repercussions of some actors involved in the controversies triggered by censorships. The first case widespread internationally: in September 2016, Facebook removed a post from the Norwegian writer Tom Egeland which contained the photograph "The Terror of War", taken by Nick Ut (1972). This is the famous image of a naked girl running from a Napalm attack during the Vietnam War. When the Norwegian newspaper AftenPost republished the photo on its own page, Facebook suggested that it should be pixelated, and deleted the image before the journalists could answer the notification. The reaction was published on the cover of the printed edition of the following day: an open letter - written in English - to Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook.



Image 1: Aftenpost printed edition. Source: Hansen (2016).

Calling Zuckerberg the "world's most powerful editor", the editor-in-chief accuses him of "limiting freedom (...) in an authoritarian way," shaking the "mainstay of our democratic society" (Hansen, 2016). The repercussion of the case involved even the Norwegian Prime Minister, who was emphatic: "Facebook had no right to edit history" (Solberg, 2016). Facebook then apologized and released the circulation of the image, claiming that it would learn from the error to avoid future problems (Dagenborg, 2016).

The second case that we highlight is the censorship of the Brazilian magazine *Piseagrama* (in English, "tread on the grass"), which defines itself as a "non-profit

publication about public spaces: existing, urgent, imaginary". Facebook blocked its page after posting of a cover with a photograph of an Amazonian *Yawalapiti* indian with naked breasts. The image of the indian caring a tree seedling in her hands was taken in 1958, during a reforestation campaign undertaken by the Brazilian dictatorial government. By reviving this unknown photograph, the magazine emphasizes that it preserves the prophecy of "shamanic images", because "while the indians multiply by cultivating the forest, despite the persistent and systematic plans to decimate them, the friends of the motherland knock down trees like never before in the History of this country".

Restricted to the Brazilian followers of the page, the repercussion of the case wasn't enough to reverse the censorship of Facebook – the platform never answered to the administrators' messages. For the editors, "it seems that the guys from the Silicon Valley didn't understand that indians do not wear T-shirts and that uncovered breasts are not pornography. In fact, we have to say that there is a lot of hypocrite machismo and puritanism in this policy" (Piseagrama 2, 2016). The publication was obligated to create a new page, in which it republished the image by covering the breasts of the indian.



Image 2: Picture edited after censorship. Source: Piseagrama 2 (2016).

The significant difference in the public repercussion and the response given by Facebook to the two cases described here allows us to point out that different regimes of knowledge and power are at stake in the censorship of images with traces of nudity in this platform. The restriction of the circulation of perhaps the most famous image of the Vietnam War provoked a wide international repercussion by actors who, in short, demanded from Facebook to respect the values of contemporary Western society, including "freedom of expression" and respect to "History".

Yet the almost silent censorship of the image of the Brazilian indian reinforces not only the invisibility of the indigenous cause in the country, but also an apparent inability of the algorithms and the public that respond to them to recognize non-Eurocentric cosmopolitics. Then, it's pertinent to point out that, like Western cosmopolitan culture, Facebook considers the bodies as something finished, and not as a locus of disputes or something to be discovered, like the belief of the Amerindian

cosmology of the *Yawalapiti* and others ethnicities. Future discussions about the mononaturalism of the digital platforms and their networks publics are recommended for a better comprehension of the cosmopolitics of the algorithms.

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