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MASTER THESIS

**AGNOTOLOGY 2.0:
MAPPING THE POLITICS OF IGNORANCE IN DIGITAL
SPACE**

by

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**A thesis submitted to the Alliance of Civilizations Institute in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Civilizations Studies**

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ISTANBUL, 2024

APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Civilizations Studies.

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I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.



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ÖZ

Agnotology 2.0:
Dijital Alanda Cehaletin Politikasını Haritalandırmak

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Bu tez, dijital medya platformları aracılığıyla cehaletin kasıtlı olarak nasıl üretildiğini ve kullanıldığını anlamak için Agnotology 2.0 çerçevesini araştırmaktadır. Çalışma, güçlü kuruluş ve şahısların çıkarlarını korumak için cehalet ürettikleri yakın tarih örnekleri inceleyerek agnotoloji konusunda teorik bir temel oluşturur. Bu kavramı dijital çağa genişleterek, kullanıcı tarafından üretilen içerik, sosyal medya algoritmaları ve viral yanlış bilgilendirmenin cehalet üretiminin parçalı bir manzarasını nasıl yarattığını inceler. Agnotology 2.0, Web 1.0'dan Web 2.0'a geçişten ilham alarak, modern teknolojilerin yanlış bilginin yayılmasını nasıl kolaylaştırdığını vurgular.

Araştırma, Meta (Facebook ve Instagram) gibi sosyal medya platformlarının kritik jeopolitik olaylar sırasında içerik moderasyonundaki rolüne odaklanır. Mayıs 2021'deki Şeyh Cerrah mahallesi tahliyesi ve 7 Ekim 2023 Hamas operasyonu sonrası Gazze'deki çatışmaların vaka çalışmaları, Meta'nın politikalarının Filistinli sesleri orantısız bir şekilde sustururken diğer anlatıları nasıl güçlendirdiğini ortaya koyar. Bu eylemler, dijital platformların bilgi kontrolü ve muhalefetin bastırılması için araçlar olarak sistemik önyargıları ve daha geniş sonuçlarını gözler önüne serer.

Tez, ekonomik ve politik gündemler tarafından yönlendirilen sosyal medya platformlarının tarafsız araçlar olmadığını, aksine cehalet ve önyargıyı sürdürme yollarında tasarlandığını savunur. Bu teknolojilerin gömülü değerlerini ve operasyonel dinamiklerini eleştirel bir şekilde incelemenin önemini vurgular. Sonuç, teknolojinin tarafsız olmadığını, bilgi ve yanlış bilginin dijital çağdaki zorluklarını ele almak için agnotolojinin rolünü tanımanın önemini vurgular. Çalışma, bilgi kontrolünün karmaşıklıklarını anlamak için eleştirel bir çerçeve sunar ve dijital yönetim ve içerik moderasyonuna daha bilinçli ve adil yaklaşımlar benimsenmesini teşvik eder.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Agnotoloji 2.0, Cehalet Üretimi, Dijital Medya Platformları, İçerik Moderasyonu, Post-Gerçek, Sosyal Medya Önyargısı

ABSTRACT

Agnotology 2.0:
Mapping the Politics of Ignorance in Digital Space

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This thesis examines ‘traditional’ agnotology and brings forth a new conceptual paradigm as ‘Agnotology 2.0’ — that aims to (de)construct the intentional manufacturing and perpetuation of ignorance using digital space. The study discusses the existing debates in traditional agnotology and investigates how power structures manufacture ignorance to perpetuate their socio-politico-economic hegemony. I extend this debate as the repackaging of traditional agnotology into the digital era where content created by users, chatbots and algorithms becomes popular and is used to spread mis/disinformation, that crafts the fragmented landscape of truth and manufactures ignorance differently. Agnotology 2.0 explores how technological leap enables the dissemination of false information in a post-truth era when emotional appeal often takes precedence over factual correctness. This concept draws inspiration from the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0.

This study structures its empirical findings on the role of social media platforms, especially Meta-owned Facebook and Instagram as a capitalist entity in a nation-state paradigm significantly shaping Agnotology 2.0 as a conceptual framework in the last decades’ geopolitical events. The case studies of the May 2021 eviction in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and the ongoing war in Gaza after October 2023 demonstrate how Meta’s tactics unfairly and systemically suppress Palestinian voices while promoting other narratives to a greater extent. These activities reveal the inherent biases inside systems and the wider consequences of digital platforms being used to manipulate information and stifle opposing viewpoints.

The research finally problematizes digital spaces as inherently non-neutral terrains, where ignorance and prejudice are perpetuated through deliberate and systematic engineering of partiality. It necessitates a comprehensive interrogation of the underlying principles and operational mechanisms of these technologies, advocating for their redefinition towards societal amelioration. Consequently, this study offers a pivotal framework for understanding the complexities of information governance in

contemporary society, advocating for more informed and equitable approaches to digital governance and content regulation.

Keywords: Agnotology 2.0, Content Moderation, Digital Media Platforms, Ignorance Production, Post-Truth, Social Media Bias



DEDICATION

To the fallen birds and silenced voices of Gaza

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With a heart full of gratitude, I first and foremost thank Allah (SWT) for His endless mercy, guidance, and the abundant rizq He has provided me throughout this journey. What began as an effort to overcome part of my own ignorance has ultimately left me more perplexed, yet profoundly humbled. In His wisdom, He has shown me that the pursuit of knowledge is as much about embracing uncertainty as it is about seeking clarity.

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TABLE OF CONTENT

ÖZ	1
ABSTRACT	2
DEDICATION	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	5
LIST OF TABLES	5
LIST OF FIGURES	6
INTRODUCTION	1
Methodology	9
Research Approach and Objectives	9
Rationale For Chosen Theoretical Approach.....	11
Data Collection and Analysis.....	13
Thesis Overview.....	15
CHAPTER I	17
AGNOTOLOGY	17
1.1.Ignorance as a Void: A Philosophical Account	18
1.2. The Paradox of Knowledge Society.....	21
1.3. Ignorance Is Not Bliss.....	23
1.3.1. On the Taxonomies and Uses of Ignorance	25
1.3.2. Ignorance as an Original State	31
1.3.4. Ignorance as Passive Construct.....	33
1.3.5. Deliberate Construction of Ignorance	36
1.3.6. Collective Amnesia?	42
1.3.7. Epistemologies of Ignorance.....	45
1.4. Chapter Summary.....	46
CHAPTER II	48
AGNOTOLOGY 2.0 – MAPPING IGNORANCE IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL MEDIA	48

2.1. From Manipulated Consumers to Active Readers: Critical Media Theories..	49
2.2. Towards A Theory of Digital Agnotology.....	54
2.2.1. Is Technology What We Make of It?.....	56
2.2.2. Opaque Algorithms: Opinions Embedded in Math.....	58
2.2.3. Post-Truth Regimes: An Erosion of Trust	61
2.3. The Myth of Internet Freedom and Free Flow of Information	65
2.4. Affective Ignorance.....	69
2.5. Chapter Summary.....	74
CHAPTER III.....	77
TECHNICAL GLITCH OR SYSTEMIC SILENCING?	77
3.1. Case Study: May 2021, Sheikh Jarrah Eviction and Meta Policies	80
3.1.2. Online Warfare: Censorship of Palestinian Content	82
3.1.3. Platform Governance and Patterns of Digital Silencing	82
3.1.4. Navigating Grey Areas: Meta’s Content Moderation Mechanisms.....	86
3.1.5. New Governors of Online Speech.....	87
3.2. Are the People Being Lied To?.....	89
3.3. October 7, 2023, and Apocalyptic Violence in Gaza Strip.....	90
3.3.1. October 7 in Context: An Overview	90
3.3.2. There is a Bug in the System.....	93
3.4. White Ignorance: Russia-Ukraine War	96
CONCLUSION.....	106
Policy Interventions to Combat Digital Ignorance.....	111
BIBLIOGRAPHY	114
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	130
GENİŞLETİLMİŞ TÜRKÇE ÖZET	131

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. A Categorization of Different Unknowns and Agnotology.....	26
Table 2. Traditional Agnotology Vs. Agnotology 2.0.....	75



LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1. Mapping Agnotology.....	31
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INTRODUCTION

Amid the digital deluge of our hyper-connected age, where information is boundless and knowledge seems ever within reach, Stanford historian Robert N. Proctor provocatively dubs our time a "golden age of ignorance" (Harford, 2017). Although ignorance has always been an inherent part of human existence, what makes Proctor's claim so striking is the deliberate and systematic cultivation of ignorance in an era that celebrates enlightenment and progress.

Historically, ignorance was often viewed as a deficiency, a void to be filled through education or discovery. For example, Aristotle viewed ignorance as a correctable 'privation,' where knowledge could be gained by overcoming the absence of understanding (*Metaphysics*, 982b). Yet, in the last few decades, scholars have begun to reframe ignorance not just as a passive absence but as something more dynamic and deliberate. Robert N. Proctor coined the term 'agnotology' as a framework to study cultural and political construction of ignorance (Proctor, 2008).

The very emergence of agnotology as a field point to the growing recognition that ignorance is not always an accidental byproduct of human limitations (Beck, 1986; Gross, 2017; Proctor, 2008). Agnotology suggests that ignorance is not always bliss. It is not always a natural state that humans are born into but something that can actively be produced just like knowledge (Smithson, 1985). Ignorance is a strategic tool used by elites to avoid penalties, increase profit, and maintain dominance (McGoey, 2012). For years, the tobacco industry utilized doubt and uncertainty to maintain society's ignorance of the linkage between smoking and lung cancer (Proctor, 2008), and science was wielded for this cause. Hence, agnotology challenges the mainstream epistemology that believes in science as the only valid way of producing and understanding knowledge. For instance, Orientalism is a form of agnotology.

Constructed ignorance about Muslims and Islam is “designed to both relegate them to the margins and deprive them of the power of self-representation” (Sardar, 2022, p.6). Agnotology is deeply embedded in the “neutral institutions of American society and democracy,” contends Gordon Blaine Steffey (2022). This includes world history taught in schools, the principles and rules of liberalism and even the very categories of neutrality and reason (p.99). All of these factors contribute to ignorance turning into an integral part of knowledge production and its practices. In the contemporary age of technology, agnotology is exemplified by fake news, proliferation of dis- or mis-information, algorithmic bias, systemic censorship, and online surveillance capitalism. The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) which includes chatbots that provide guidance and assist in administrative tasks, coupled with the vast availability of information online has significantly transformed modern information consumption (O’Neil, 2016; Nobel, 2014). While these technological advancements offer unparalleled convenience, they come at a considerable cost. There has been a discernible erosion of mankind's ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood. As articulated by DeNicola (2017), individuals have become both objects and subjects of their own ignorance (p.4).

Although agnotology has stimulated discourse on the deliberate creation and perpetuation of ignorance across diverse disciplinary domains, notably in science and environmental studies, it has also been criticized for its limited scope focusing mainly on the corruption in science, ignoring the systemic and structural mechanisms role in ignorance production (Sardar, 2022; Kourany and Carrier, 2020). Hence, this work aims to examine this current culture of digital ignorance, focusing on the mechanisms, functions, and the profound impact they have on public perception, marginalized voices and international politics.

The prevailing discourse around information and communication technologies (ICT) has often been framed in instrumentalist terms (Friedman, 1962; McCarthy, 2015), positing that technology is inherently neutral and gains significance only through human agency—much like a gun, which can either eliminate a threat or kill an innocent child. However, this view is simplistic and reductive, overlooking the intricate and

multifaceted dynamics that define modern digital technologies. The internet and the technologies one engage with in their daily life, whether by choice or necessity, are mathematically formulated and encoded in ways that not only automate discrimination and bias but also confine the user within ‘echo chambers.’ In these echo chambers, a person predominantly encounters voices that mirror their own beliefs. More critically, beyond any pretense of benignity or objectivity, ‘big data’ and algorithms are created by humans who embody specific values, many of which have been shown to “openly promote racism” (Noble, 2014, p. 1).

Furthermore, digital platforms do not function autonomously. Rather, they operate within the frameworks of ‘information capitalism’ and ‘communicative capitalism’ where the production and valorization of knowledge become central to the accumulation of value (Poell, 2014, p. 191). In this context, user-generated content transforms into a commodity, primarily in the form of metadata which corporations like Meta and Google leverage for targeted advertising, often at the expense of user privacy and agency (Fuchs, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013). Consequently, these strategies are extremely important as they determine and/or influence ‘technological architectures and policies of social platforms,’ which are primarily designed to manage and facilitate “user profiling” (Poell, 2014, p.191). The case of Cambridge Analytica during the 2016 US election is one of the early examples of how metadata has been utilized at the expense of user privacy to profile users and generate targeted ads to influence public decision-making (Boldyreva, 2018).

Though this instrumentalist perspective has been challenged by scholars such as Lewis Mumford (1934), Jacques Ellul (1954), Martin Heidegger (1954), and Joseph Weizenbaum (1976), their critiques frequently adopt an essentialist stance which portrays technology as intrinsically problematic. For instance, Ellul argues that “technology ultimately depends upon itself, it maps its own route, it is a prime and not a secondary factor, it must be regarded as an 'organism' tending toward closure and self-determination; it is an end in itself” (Ellul, 1980, p.125).

While Ellul's critique of technology is insightful, it is limited when applied to contemporary digital technologies and social media platforms. His analysis falls short

by treating technology as an autonomous system that is detached from human agency. This overlooks the integral role humans play in shaping and maintaining technological development. This project contends that technologies are inherently value-laden and evolve within specific historical, socio-political, and economic contexts, rather than in isolation. As such, a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between humans and technology is necessary. This perspective extends beyond the social construction of technology (SCOT) frameworks, which, as Andrew Feenberg (1991) notes, often focus on micro-political dynamics. By considering the global impact of technology, this research underscores the importance of human agency not only in the use of technologies, as instrumentalists propose, but also in their design and infrastructure. Agnotology as a framework enables one to bridge this gap between the message and the medium, the content and the platform, providing a holistic approach. Hence, ignoring this perspective risks absolving creators and owners of technology from accountability, enabling tech-companies like Meta to attribute issues to technical glitches or automated service.

Social media platforms emerged from the dynamic complexity of the internet. They were developed by individuals who were inspired by the potential freedom the web had offered them, aiming to facilitate and expand participation, expression, and social interactions. However, as these platforms expanded, they inevitably became host to the same chaos and conflict present on the internet. When then-Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg seized the opportunity to create the platform Facebook (now the larger company known as Meta), he was likely unaware of its eventual significance as a global platform connecting millions and mobilizing communities across various regions. Since its inception, social media has profoundly transformed not only communication and networking but also political activism, particularly in the Arab world and the MENA region. This impact became especially evident during the Arab Uprisings of 2011 and 2012, the first major political events in which social media platforms played a pivotal role (Tufekci, 2017). Platforms such as Twitter (now X), YouTube, and Facebook became instrumental in mobilizing citizens, organizing protests, coordinating aid efforts, and drawing international attention (Kavanaugh et al., 2011; Tufekci, 2017, p.23).

Social media was perceived as a tool that finally democratized information and freedom of expression. Indeed, when one accesses the current Meta website and scrolls down, it reads: ‘The goal of our Community Standards is to create a place for expression and give people a voice...to be able to talk openly about the issues that matter to them...even if some may disagree or find them objectionable’ (Bickert, 2019, para. 3).

However, for more than a decade Meta (originally Facebook)’s platform governance and content moderation policies have only underscored the superficiality of that commitment. Meta itself has turned into a gatekeeper of information and censored more voices and narratives than perhaps an authoritarian state or traditional mass media source would have been able to. Israel’s ongoing war on Gaza which began on October 7, 2023, is a prominent example of Meta’s double standard. Palestinians have been living under occupation with restricted surveillance and mobility for more than 75 years. In that time internet activism has undergone a significant transformation, evolving from the dissemination of humanitarian and political information to a robust form of online political mobilization and critical dialogues (Nabulsi, 2014). This evolution has reshaped power dynamics surrounding the representation of Palestine, moving away from the traditional narrative driven by mainstream media toward decentralized networks where individuals act as both content creators and consumers. These producers and citizen journalists provide real-time accounts of unfolding events (Siapera, 2014). However, social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram (both owned by Meta) have turned into online battlegrounds for Palestinians where they struggle against content moderation and constant censorship. Meta stated on their official website that “in some cases, we allow content – which would otherwise go against our standards – if it’s newsworthy and in the public interest” (Meta, 2024, para. 5). However, Meta’s exceptionalism has only been applicable in limited contexts, such as the current war in Russia-Ukraine. Since October 7, 2023, more than hundreds of journalist accounts and posts relating to Palestine have been either restricted or removed (7amleh, 2023). Yet, Meta has for years attributed this to a “technical glitch” and consistently denied the systemic act of silencing Palestinians and marginalized voices in general.

As there are different definitions of what constitutes social media, it is important to specify what social media represents in the context of the thesis and why the conventional critical theories of mass media no longer apply. As suggested by Chaffee and Metzger (2024), “mass communication was perceived to be uncontrollable” largely due to the monopolization of media channels, resulting in a limited number of gatekeepers who dictated the content which was accessible to the masses (p.367). This consolidation of power raised concerns about the implications of mass persuasion and the homogenization of content, a process that Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) described as producing entertainment which amuses rather than enlightens. Herman and Chomsky (1988) argued in their ‘Propaganda Model’ that mainstream media operates within a centralized framework designed to serve elite interests. On the other hand, the portrayal of audiences as ‘atomized and helpless’ highlighted a prevailing fear regarding the potential of mass media to exploit vulnerable populations (Chaffee and Hochheimer, 1985, p.367). In contrast to traditional media, where information flows in a unidirectional manner controlled by centralized and hierarchical institutions, digital platforms cultivate user-driven networks that transform how we interact with information. On these platforms, content is not only created and shared but also continually reshaped in real time, complicating the dynamics of political discourse and the mechanisms of control surrounding it.

One of the most common ways to define ‘social media’ is that it encompasses digital technologies which focus on user-generated content or interaction (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Terry 2009; O'Reilly 2005; Anderson, 2007). Social media platforms are usually characterized by their channel features, either by indicating the directionality of messages (Kent 2010) or by underscoring specific platforms such as Facebook or Twitter to illustrate modes of interaction (Howard and Parks, 2012). Some of the simple definitions only focus on the nature of message construction in social media, viewing it as devices “that facilitate online communication, networking, and/or collaboration” (Russo et al. 2008, p.22). In the same vein, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” (p.61). Although these definitions clarify

common traits of social media or communication technologies, they remain narrow and fall short in portraying a holistic picture of the different dynamics of communication technologies. The closest and most comprehensive definition thus far that provides a more nuanced and multidimensional explanation of social media is that of Philip N. Howard and Malcolm R. Parks (2012). They write:

(a) the information infrastructure and tools used to produce and distribute content; (b) the content that takes the digital form of personal messages, news, ideas, and cultural products; and (c) the people, organizations, and industries that produce and consume digital content (p.359).

This definition draws attention to three most important dimensions of social media that are crucial for understanding the premises and discussions, especially in chapters two and three of this thesis (representing the case study). Howard and Parks (2012) emphasize firstly on digital platforms, technologies, and tools that enable users to create, publish, share, and distribute content online. Social media includes diverse platforms such as websites, applications, and other services designed to facilitate communication and interaction among users. These platforms range from social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to blogging platforms such as WordPress and content sharing platforms like YouTube (Carr and Hyes, 2015; Howard and Parks, 2012). As contended by Howard and Parks (2012), social media involves different types of digital content created and shared by users, including personal messages, status updates, photos, videos, news stories, and other cultural products. It serves as a space where people generate and consume information and expression. It is important to underscore the actors engaged in producing, sharing, and consuming digital content across social media platforms as they play a crucial role in shaping this dynamic environment (Carr and Hyes, 2015; Howard and Parks, 2012). As such, the upcoming chapters of this thesis look to examine Meta-owned Facebook and Instagram platforms both as a medium but also as a dynamic environment where the actors behind these technologies, creators or consumers, and the generated content are all interacting and affecting the design and experiences of each other.

Although there is a growing body of literature in the field (Gillespie, 2018; Roberts, 2016; Pasquale, 2015; Pariser, 2011), there remains a lack of substantial work that theorizes and provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the role of digital media and networking platforms in the production of ignorance at a deeper level. This gap can be addressed by exploring areas that have not yet been fully examined. This thesis will attempt to bridge the concept of agnotology with Information and Communication Technologies Studies, which may, in turn, foster fruitful discussions and offer alternative perspectives for future studies on the critical issues shaping the contemporary age. To make agnotology relevant to digital media platform studies, this thesis will introduce the theory of 'Agnotology 2.0.' as a framework extending and expanding the scope of the original theory. Agnotology 2.0 is inspired by the neologism of Darcy DiNucci's 'Web 2.0,' which represents a shift from the early days of the web (referred to as 1.0, which was a one-way medium) to a more dynamic medium with user-generated content and multiple party interaction (O'Reilly, 2005; Anderson, 2007). Agnotology 2.0, therefore, provides insights into how ignorance is produced and instrumentalized in the digital age through diverse mechanisms and mediums that often aim to bypass legal and ethical responsibility.

It is also important to underscore that the primary objective of this project does not lie in portraying social media as inherently malevolent, taking into consideration the pivotal role social networking technologies like Meta played during social movements of 2011 like the Arab Spring and still does, even if it is diverted to a more authoritarian profit driven force controlling and restricting the information that goes in and comes out of its platforms. Our objective is rather to critically examine how these technologies' design and operational dynamics contribute to fostering conditions conducive to ignorance. What are the factors and mechanism that facilitate the digital culture of ignorance? Through the theoretical framework of Agnotology 2.0, this project aims to address the problem of how do governance practices on social media platforms, particularly Meta, influence the regulation of information flow and the "freedom" of speech/expression, from initial design decisions to their political contexts, and their strategic use of ignorance? We are exploring these dynamics by looking closely at Meta's operations and systems, how they enforce rules and policies,

navigate issues in the context of war and conflict, and sometimes choose what not to address. By doing so, our aim is to shed light on the asymmetric power dynamics in play that closely intersect with political agendas, determining the boundaries of digital space-the central and the periphery- along with who has the right to participate in and influence a discourse. Echoing David Harvey's (2008) "The Right to the City," we ask: who has the right to digital space? The following chapter describes the methodology used by this thesis to address the aforementioned concerns.

Methodology

Research Approach and Objectives

This research adopts a multi-method approach, combining a secondary literature review, qualitative case studies, and expert interviews. The use of these varied methods allows for a comprehensive exploration of how agnotology manifests on Meta-owned platforms like Facebook and Instagram, particularly in the context of digital governance and moderation practices and their impact on marginalized voices. Through these methods, this study explores the evolving mechanisms that generate and perpetuate ignorance in digital spaces, extending the traditional scope of agnotology to what this author terms Agnotology 2.0.

Agnotology, the theoretical framework that informs this thesis, is derived from a sub-branch of ignorance studies. Agnotology refers to the deliberate production of ignorance as studied in the work of prominent scholars Robert Proctor and Linda Schienbinger (1995, 2008), Michael Smithson (1985, 2008, 2012), and Linsey McGoey (2012, 2020). Building on the traditional theory of agnotology, this research has extended its insight to the digital realm under Agnotology 2.0. While conducting literature review and analyzing the already existing literature, one clearly observable gap was the understudy of contemporary mediums and tools that generate ignorance, which bears the necessity of expanding and enlarging the scope of traditional

frameworks of ignorance. The emphasis is put on the changing nature of the medium and mechanism through which ignorance is produced or instrumentalized today. In order to do so, this thesis will refer to the fields of critical media studies and information and technology studies (ICT) to situate Agnotology 2.0 in a post-truth context.

To connect theoretical discussions with practical insights, the author of this thesis conducted three semi-structured expert interviews with social media professionals. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and were conducted via Zoom and transcribed for detailed analysis. This method was selected because expert interviews allow for the collection of specialized knowledge that is often inaccessible through conventional academic research. As Roulston (2010) emphasizes, expert interviews provide a means to access ‘elite knowledge,’ helping to bridge the gap between theory and the rapidly evolving practices of content moderation and governance on social media platforms.

The decision to include interviews with professionals working within or closely observing social media platforms is informed by the work of Bourdieu (1984), who critiques the separation between theoretical knowledge and practical expertise. By engaging with field experts, the study seeks to overcome this divide and ‘give voice’ to practitioners who often possess ‘experiential knowledge’ (Flyvbjerg, 2001) of the platform's operational realities. Extending the argument by Schudson (2006), it is crucial to integrate practitioner insights into academic discourse for understanding how media institution’s function, especially in relation to the reproduction of ignorance.

The semi-structured format of the interviews was particularly useful for exploring complex, evolving phenomena such as platform governance and algorithmic bias, as well as understanding the political dimensions at play and exploring potential pathways for future action. According to Kvale and Brinkmann’s (2009) semi-structured interviews allow for in depth exploration while providing the flexibility to pursue emergent themes. The interviewees’ perspectives on how platforms manage

and moderate content, particularly in relation to censorship and misinformation, were indispensable for refining and complementing the analysis of case studies.

Subsequently, the study scrutinizes the applicability of Agnotology 2.0. through a case study of Meta's content moderation policies during the Sheikh Jarrah eviction conflict in May 2021, when Israeli forces occupied Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem. It draws comparisons between the moderation policies around Sheikh Jarrah in 2021 and moderation policies pertaining to the ongoing Israeli war on Gaza following the Palestinian resistance operation of October 7, 2023. Case studies were selected because they allow for the detailed exploration of specific instances where platform power is exercised, revealing the mechanisms of control; (Yin, 2018) that shape public discourse. In particular, these cases illustrate how Meta's moderation policies disproportionately affect marginalized voices, and particularly affect pro-Palestinian content, while amplifying dominant narratives. The project specifically examines Palestinian and pro-Palestinian content on Instagram and Facebook. Further, by integrating constructivist and institutionalist approaches to examine how ignorance is generated and maintained (Proctor, 2008), and systematically treating ignorance as a social construct, this study sheds light on the motivations behind the creation and perpetuation of silences and ambiguities, as well as the structural mechanisms and tactics that facilitate and automate these processes.

Rationale For Chosen Theoretical Approach

This approach was selected due to asymmetry in the implication of policies, governance processes, and content moderation which has resulted in the silencing of Palestinian voices on social media platforms for over a decade now locally and globally. This has occurred through acts of 'overenforcement,' 'underenforcement,' and, finally, in light of Charles Mills' theory of 'White Ignorance' (2008). The latter can be observed where Meta's policy of exceptionalism applied to Ukrainians in the context of war with Russia.

Although the topic of social media moderation policies and functioning has been studied from different angles and perspectives, this project aims to contextualize technology not as a neutral tool in service of human agents (McCarthy, 2008), but an active, value-laden structure defined and functioning within the broader context it is designed. Hence, this research reorients the attention from users of technology to the system and agents or producers of technology. In this light, Meta's platform governance processes and content moderation policies are analyzed and situated within the broader U.S. politics and foreign or international policies, and surveillance capitalism.

The choice of Meta-owned Facebook and Instagram platforms as a sample has clear rationale, as these are the largest and most used platforms globally. This is especially true for countries in the Middle East, which includes the people of Palestine living under a restrictive and oppressive Zionist regime with limited resources to advocate for justice, mobilize, and document human rights violations during war and conflicts (Lewis 2023; Tufekci 2018).

In a recent Pew poll (2021), findings revealed that 62 percent of adults rely on social media for their news consumption, with 71 percent of that proportion obtaining news from Facebook. This translates to 44 percent of the entire adult population in the US receiving news through Facebook. In another Statista (2021) survey, it was found that the majority of respondents in India, Argentina, Australia, and Brazil relied on social networks as their primary source of news. Across 40 countries, more than half of adults used social media for news consumption, with rates exceeding 70 percent in Kenya, South Africa, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Facebook and Instagram are the most visited apps in MENA regions with over 70 million active users on Facebook and 33 million active users on Instagram (Radcliffe et. al. 2022).

Further, the limited time and scope of this research make a multi-layered and multi-platform analysis and case study design challenging. Additionally, Meta-owned Facebook and Instagram, beside their popularity, are pivotal to both social and political debates around platform governance (Gorwa, 2019).

Data Collection and Analysis

Regarding the case studies, document analysis is utilized as a key method for gathering data. This method is suitable for several reasons. Firstly, it is effective in qualitative studies, enabling access to a wide range of information that might not be readily available through primary data collection (Bowen, 2009). Furthermore, it is cost-effective and time-efficient as it utilizes already available resources, where gathering primary data over extended periods can be resource-intensive.

Through this method, the study reviews and evaluates a variety of documents including policy documents and statements from Meta, reports from human rights organizations like Human Rights Watch and 7amleh (The Arab Center for the Advancement of social media), Access Now (digital civil rights non-profit organization), academic articles, and news articles from global media networks like Al Jazeera and non-profit American news organization The Intercept.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) is a prominent and reliable international organization focused on human rights advocacy. Their extensive reports and analyses of state and corporate practices provide critical insights into issues related to censorship and the suppression of free expression, particularly in conflict zones. HRW have systematically documented and reported Meta's censorship of Palestinian content for both 2021 and 2023. Analyzing HRW's findings offers a reliable source in understanding Meta's censorship of Palestinian content and human rights violations.

7amleh (The Arab Center for the Advancement of social media) is a grassroots organization dedicated to promoting digital rights in the Arab world, 7amleh provides valuable local perspectives on how social media platforms operate and how they affect communities in the region. 7amleh is actively documenting violations of digital rights, highlighting numerous human rights abuses directed at Palestinians, particularly in relation to their use of social media. In 2023, 7amleh launched the Palestinian Digital Rights Observatory, 7or, which documented 4,400 violations of digital rights. In

response to the war on Gaza that began on October 7, 2023, 7amleh actively documented online human rights violations, advocated for a ceasefire, and developed the “Violence Indicator,” an AI-driven tool to monitor hate speech against Palestinians in Hebrew on social media.

Access Now is a prominent non-profit organization dedicated to advocating for digital civil rights and addressing issues of Internet censorship globally. Founded in 2009, the organization is known for its comprehensive reports on Internet shutdowns and its annual RightsCon conference, which highlights human rights issues in the digital landscape. Their Shutdown Tracker Optimization Project (STOP) utilizes a combination of remotely sensed data, news reports, and information from local activists and ISPs to verify instances of Internet disruptions. This multifaceted approach not only enhances the reliability of their findings but also underscores the importance of grassroots activism and local insights in advocating for digital rights.

News Articles from Global Media Networks such as Al Jazeera and The Intercept provide important journalistic perspectives on current events from a critical approach, particularly regarding social and political issues in the Middle East. Their coverage often includes in-depth investigations and analyses of misinformation and censorship practices that are based on reliable sources. By incorporating these articles and researches from these outlets this study is able to analyze how mainstream media narratives portray the instances of censorship and sensitive events.

Documents have been selected based on their relevance to Meta's content moderation practices during the specified period of May 2021. This includes reports and articles that were published after the fact, as long as they were concerning the Sheikh Jarrah conflict that ended on May 20, 2021, following a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. The same process is applied for documents from October 7, 2023, to April 2024 related to Israel's ongoing war on Gaza. Though the war continues at the time of writing, this study intentionally selected only data collected up until April as the first few months of the war witnessed an intense policy of censorship that was documented extensively by NGOs and news outlets. The documents were collected by using specific keywords

and phrases including ‘censorship, May 2021 Israel-Palestine Conflict, October 7, 2023, Meta Policies,’ and Content Moderation. Using keywords and phrases allowed the study to trace patterns, developments, and changes over time, offering a contextual and historical perspective that is crucial for understanding the evolution of policies and practices (Bowen. 2009; Krippendorff, 2018). The collected data material is further classified and analyzed under meta-themes of content moderation, platform governance or policies, and patterns of digital silencing that trace the mechanism at play. This was done to facilitate a nuanced understanding of whether censorship practices reflect deliberate and systemic efforts to obscure information and silence marginalized voices in favor of dominant narratives. The study further explores whether changes in policies or practices correlate with external events (such as geopolitical shifts or public pressure), providing in-depth insights into the reasons and mechanisms fueling the censorship behaviors.

Thesis Overview

This thesis is composed of three chapters apart from the introduction. Following the introduction regarding the topic, methodology, research objectives, Chapters One and Two establish the theoretical frameworks for the analysis of the case study in Chapter Three.

Chapter One introduces agnotology by first providing a philosophical or traditional account of ignorance, and eventually the evolution of it into agnotology as a theoretical field of inquiry for studying the deliberate productions, dissemination, and maintenance of ignorance in contemporary context. It further outlines the various theoretical approaches, taxonomies, and uses of ignorance to establish the ground for the second chapter on Agnotology 2.0.

Chapter Two extends the scope of ignorance to the digital realm. Differing from the traditional theory of agnotology, Agnotology 2.0. emerges in the digital age and is characterized by the pervasive influence of social media and decentralized information and communication technologies. Here, dis/misinformation, fake news, bots speaking

as humans and vice versa and different forms of ignorance proliferate not only from powerful elites but also from decentralized networks where general users are emphasized. The mechanisms of social media platforms that are driven by algorithms that prioritize engagement, amplify misinformation regardless of its veracity, and foster echo chambers and spread falsehoods regulate the main argument of chapter.

Chapter Three presents a case study of the forced eviction of Sheikh Jarrah in May 2021 and the Israeli war on Gaza on October 7, 2023, addressing research questions on how human agency in technology design transforms it into a value-laden tool rather than a neutral one affecting less-advantaged and marginalized groups. In this context, the case study is analyzed by looking into Meta-owned Facebook and Instagram content moderation policies and platform governance in understanding the systemic censorship of Palestinian voices. The case is further analyzed in light of agnotological framework and expert interviews conducted by the author.

CHAPTER I

AGNOTOLOGY

The Study of what we do not know can be as revealing as the study of what we do know.

(Londa Schiebinger, 2008)

Ignorance as a concept has evolved into a multifaceted field of study characterized by its diverse applications and theoretical depth. What was once perceived as a mere absence of knowledge is now recognized as an active and often strategic phenomenon, with deliberate mechanisms shaping its production and dissemination. First coined by Robert Proctor (2008), the term ‘agnotology’ marks a significant departure from traditional understandings of ignorance by focusing on its intentional construction. Agnotology explores how ignorance is not simply a byproduct of neglect or oversight but is often systematically generated for political, social, or economic gain. As a result, the study of ignorance has expanded beyond the history of science to encompass a range of fields, including environmental studies (McGoey, 2012), feminist theory (Tuana, 2006), critical race theory (Mills, 1997), and public health (Frickel & Edwards, 2014). This chapter critically engages with the primary literature on agnotology, scrutinizing how this theory has been mobilized across various disciplines. It also interrogates whether the framework retains its conceptual integrity or risks dilution as it is applied to diverse domains. As agnotology continues to shape contemporary discussions around power, knowledge, and control, it remains crucial to assess its effectiveness in addressing the intricate ways by which ignorance is produced and sustained within these shifting contexts. Furthermore, the evaluation and literature review in this chapter lay the groundwork for more detailed analysis in the

second chapter as its scope is expanded through Agnotology 2.0 to encompass the digital and technological studies. The chapter proceeds with a chronological account, introducing a brief philosophical background on ignorance, followed by modern understandings of ignorance as non-knowledge, leading to the contemporary articulation of ignorance as strategic ploy.

1.1. Ignorance as a Void: A Philosophical Account

The conceptualization of ignorance as a philosophical phenomenon is not new; its origins can be traced as far as 2500 years ago (Burke 2023). Ancient philosophers have long grappled with the idea of ignorance, primarily framing it as an absence or a deficit, rather than recognizing it as a distinct phenomenon worthy of exploration. Confucius, also known as Kong Fuzi, articulated a nuanced understanding of knowledge, emphasizing the importance of recognizing both one's knowledge and ignorance. This concept resonates with Laozi's teachings in the *Daodejing*, where the text asserts that true wisdom lies in discerning the limitations of knowledge. The notion underscores the idea that attempting to express profound truths through language often leads to a loss of their essence, as the 'Deep Way' remains elusive and defies precise articulation, reducing words to mere empty constructs (Burke, 2023, p.18).

Socrates serves as a pivotal example from ancient Greece, particularly in Plato's *Theaetetus*, where he engages with Theaetetus to explore the nature of knowledge (Burnyeat, 1990). He posits that true knowledge necessitates an acknowledgment of one's ignorance, encapsulating the Socratic paradox that wisdom lies in knowing that one knows nothing (Burnyeat, 1990). This assertion challenges simplistic or absolutist definitions of knowledge, emphasizing the interplay between knowing and not knowing. Burke (2023) identifies this as an "epistemological turn" in Greek philosophy, which, while centered on the acquisition of knowledge, also implicitly introduces the epistemology of ignorance—how and why we remain ignorant (p.19).

However, contemporary theories of ignorance diverge from Socratic tradition. While Socratic ignorance focuses on self-awareness and the complexity of true knowledge, modern discussions of ignorance consider it an active and substantive force within the process of knowledge production. This recontextualization of ignorance reflects its role in power dynamics, social structures, and epistemic practices, signaling a shift from passive absence to an intentional, and often systematically maintained, feature of knowledge systems (Smithson, 1985; Proctor, 2008; Michaels; 2008; McGoey, 2012).

The first serious account of ignorance we found is in the work of famous 15th century philosopher and theologian, Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia* (On Learned Ignorance) which he wrote between 1438 and 1440. Cusa's work builds on Socratic themes but expands them in ways that foreshadow modern epistemological discussions. He suggests that the highest form of knowledge is an awareness of one's ignorance, claiming that "no greater knowledge can endow any man, even the most studious, than to discover himself supremely learned in his ignorance, which is proper to him, and he will be the more learned, the more ignorant he knows himself to be" (Nicholas and Hopkins 1985, p. 6). While inspired by Socratic self-awareness, Cusa goes further, particularly in linking ignorance to metaphysical and epistemological constraints (DeNicola, 2017, p.12). Departing from the concept of God's infinitude, he develops an epistemological method only applicable to understanding finite things. He contends that since our finite thought cannot comprehend the infinite, we cannot speak of any ratio between the finite and the infinite (Santos, 2016, p.23). Even in contemplating finite things or our world, our thinking is constrained. Thus, all our knowledge is subject to this limitation; that being so, "to know is, above all, to know the limitation, hence the notion of knowledge in not knowing." Cusa discusses two types of ignorance in his work. The first one is 'ignorant ignorance,' or 'not knowing that you do not know' and the other is 'learned ignorance' or 'knowing that you do not know' (Santos, 2016, p.23).

This recognition of epistemic limitations is pivotal in contemporary theories of ignorance, which, building on Cusa's groundwork, frame ignorance as an active presence in knowledge systems. Cusa differentiates between two types of ignorance:

"ignorant ignorance," or not knowing that one is ignorant, and "learned ignorance," which entails the recognition of one's ignorance. His typology influenced later scholars such as Smithson (1993) and Kerwin (1993), who expanded upon these distinctions in their taxonomies of ignorance. Smithson (2008), for instance, introduces the concepts of 'conscious ignorance' and 'meta-ignorance.' The former aligns with Cusa's learned ignorance, in which individuals are aware of their lack of knowledge. In contrast, meta-ignorance refers to the more troubling state of being unaware of one's ignorance, an epistemic blind spot that has far-reaching implications in fields like science, politics, and education.

Nicholas of Cusa's exploration of ignorance was largely overlooked in the centuries following his work, as most intellectual discourse focused on the pursuit of knowledge rather than its limitations. Traditional epistemology, particularly during the Enlightenment, was preoccupied with the discovery, justification, and organization of knowledge, leaving little room for the study of ignorance as a serious subject of inquiry.

One exception is the nineteenth century Scottish philosopher, James Frederick Ferrier (1854), who coined the term 'agnoiology,' which was central to his *Institutes of Metaphysic*. Ferrier's agnoiology pictures ignorance as lack of knowledge, an intellectual deficit, imperfection, as something that is remediable and could be corrected by knowledge (Keefe, 2007). He is unique in the sense that his work focuses on ignorance as a distinct philosophical category, unlike his peers who were more invested in the theory of knowledge. This absence can be attributed to the Enlightenment's valorization of reason and progress, which fostered an intellectual environment where ignorance was seen as a temporary obstacle to be overcome by scientific and philosophical advancement (DeNicola, 2017, p.13).

As science historian Robert Proctor (2008) posits, ignorance in the traditional view is understood as "something that needs correction or a natural absence or void where knowledge has not yet spread" (p.2). It suggests a deficiency of information and is usually associated with its pejorative connotations. However, recent years have

witnessed a growing interest in the study of ignorance and the unknown processes and variables in contemporary social theory and knowledge production. This is due to the emerging body of writings on reflexive modernity or risk society, which focus on how modern societies are increasingly aware of and respond to risks and uncertainties (Gross, 2007). According to these theories, the progress in societies generates new risks and uncertainties that were previously unimagined (Ulrich, 1998). Hence, to understand this crisis of knowledge in contemporary thought that simultaneously has real-life impacts, terms like ignorance, non-knowledge, and negative knowledge were employed to articulate the idea that there are some aspects of reality that are unknown and that understanding these unknowns is essential for sociologists (Gross, 2007).

1.2. The Paradox of Knowledge Society

One of the hallmarks of 20th century modernity was the belief in rationality and science to save humanity from depths of darkness, superstition, and irrationality, as Weber observed: “Principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted” (Weber, 1948, p. 138).

Weber’s ‘calculability thesis’ primarily functions to separate ignorance from knowledge, making it appear incidental. It creates a clear boundary between “secured knowledge and a distinct domain of ignorance,” with the expectation that ignorance will diminish as we accumulate more knowledge (Ungar, 2008, p.303). On the contrary, sociologists like Anthony Giddens (1990) and Ulrich Beck (1998), contend that the concept of a “knowledge” or “information society” merely masks the realities of the first modernity, namely: unresolved risks, structural inequalities, and the dominance of capitalist systems. Beck argues that humanity is still in “risk society” of the first modernity, where the focus on knowledge and information does not solve the fundamental problems of industrial society such as pollution, environmental degradation, and inequality (Beck, 1998, pp.9-36). This society is characterized by a pervasive “non-knowledge” paradigm marked by uncertainty and ambiguity (Beck, 1998, p. 115). Originally established by Georg Simmel (1858–1918), non-knowledge

(*nichtwissen*) is a “specific kind of knowledge about what is not known” (Gross 2016, p.388). Beck uses this concept in his own account to assert that contemporary ignorance differs fundamentally from its pre-modern counterpart; while in traditional understanding ignorance could be mitigated through the acquisition of “more and better knowledge and science,” today’s ignorance emerges as a by-product of scientific advancement (Beck, 1992, p.115). Hence, the relationship between knowledge and ignorance in modern society is perceived to be a paradoxical one, in the sense that the increase of knowledge means an increase in ignorance (Smithson 1989; Willke 1996).

Recent studies have revealed that sometimes a lack of knowledge or an unlearning of previously known information is “actively produced for the purpose of domination and exploitation” (Sullivan and Tuana, 2007, p.1). In this tech-driven age it is easy to suppress information or create fake news, such as the case of 2016 elections in the United States or the proliferation of Covid-19 conspiracies on social media (McIntyre, 2018). At other times individuals or organizations might choose to not know about certain information, a form of selective ignorance that will be discussed in the theoretical sense. Loewenstein et al. (2017) argue in their study on “information avoidance” that people often avoid information to mitigate negative emotions, maintain enjoyment, and reduce the cognitive burden associated with complex decisions. In contrast to false knowledge, Gross (2007) suggests that non-knowledge and ignorance are ways of delineating what is unknown. Both Smithson (1985) and Gross (2007) contend that ignorance, like knowledge, is socially constructed and shaped by the same influences that affect knowledge creation. Smithson (1985) further emphasizes that ignorance is closely linked to how information is managed, withheld, or ignored within society. Organizational and societal structures, he argues, rely on selective ignorance, whether through specialization, secrecy, or the deliberate exclusion of knowledge, to operate effectively (Smithson, 1985; Proctor, 2008).

In modern societies, Smithson (1985) states: “the public seems to be awakening to the fact that in the midst of the ‘information’ explosion, there has been an ‘ignorance’ explosion as well” (p.153). Hence, the 21st century explosion of ignorance undergirded by advancement in science and technology has led to the emergence of a niche field of study: agnotology. Initiated by Robert Proctor and Londa Schiebinger

(2008) in their seminal work *Agnotology: Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*, agnotology investigates how ignorance is produced and sustained intentionally and especially in the cultural, political, and scientific contexts.

Peter Galison (2004) conceptualizes agnotology as a form of anti-epistemology, shifting the focus from questions of how we know what we know to why we do not know what we do not know (Proctor and Schiebinger, 2008). According to Galison, this perspective highlights the mechanisms through which knowledge is “deflected, covered, and obscured” (p.42). As a broad interdisciplinary field, the study of ignorance encompasses diverse theories and subfields that explore the origins, nature, and consequences of ignorance. For the purpose of this thesis the focus will be narrowed to agnotology, a specialized branch of ignorance studies, and its application as a theoretical framework. The subsequent sections of this chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of the literature on agnotology, followed by an examination of its various applications. This will allow for a nuanced understanding of the concept and its relevance in the study of digital technologies.

1.3. Ignorance Is Not Bliss

In *Cancer Wars: How Politics Shapes What We Know and Don't Know About Cancer* (1995), Robert Proctor investigates how governments, scientists, and trade associations have deliberately obscured critical health issues, particularly the link between cigarette consumption and the rise in cancer. This study laid the groundwork for the emergence of agnotology as a specialized field. Alongside linguist Iain Boal, Proctor developed agnotology to explore how ignorance is strategically produced and sustained. He focused initially on the efforts of the tobacco industry to mislead the public about smoking risks (Proctor, 2008). Their work demonstrated the systematic creation of ignorance to protect corporate interests, marking the inception of agnotology as a critical tool for understanding how knowledge can be manipulated. Proctor challenged Boal to coin a term for the examination of “historicity and artifactuality of non-knowing and the non-known” (p.22). Boal came up with the term ‘agnotology,’ which is derived from the Greek root ‘gno’ meaning to know, with the

negating prefix ‘a,’ the addition of ‘t’ to indicate the participle, and ‘ology’ referring to the study of the root (Proctor, 2008, p.22).¹ Agnotology, a subset of ignorance studies, delves into the origins of ignorance to explore:

How ignorance is produced or maintained in diverse settings, through mechanisms such as deliberate or inadvertent neglect, secrecy and suppression, document destruction, unquestioned tradition, and myriad forms of inherent (or avoidable) culturopolitical selectivity(Proctor, 2008, p. I).

Agnotology not only questions why humans lack knowledge but also investigates the factors preventing them from knowing (Proctor, 2008, p. 3). It is the study of “ignorance making, the lost and forgotten. . . Knowledge that could have been but wasn’t, or should be but isn’t” (Proctor, 2008, p.vii). Broadly construed, agnotology encompasses the study of why certain forms of knowledge did not come to be or disappeared, were neglected, or long delayed, and the factors underpinning this state of unknowing (Proctor 2008, p.vii). However, its scope extends beyond this foundational definition. Proctor characterizes agnotology as a framework for comprehending the cultural production of ignorance, a missing term in scholarly discourse (Proctor 2008, vii).

In their edited volume *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (2008) Proctor and Schiebinger introduced agnotology as a new theoretical approach to studying scientific knowledge, emphasizing the contemporary prevalence of ignorance. The volume emerged following a series of workshops on ignorance conducted at Pennsylvania State University in 2005. Authors who contributed to the volume by Proctor and Schiebinger (2008) deciphered how certain areas of knowledge are either destroyed or fail to emerge, often due to deliberate and harmful actions. For instance, cigarette companies have intentionally sowed doubt to obscure research showing that tobacco causes cancer (Michaels 2008), or European colonial powers

¹ Another way of explaining the etymology is based on the Neoclassical Greek word agnōsis (ἄγνοσις, “not knowing”); also, Attic Greek ἄγνωτος, “unknown” and “-logia” (-λογία); and the 1854 use of “agnoiology” by a Scottish philosopher James Frederick Ferrier that we covered in the earlier section. Ferrier’s interest, however, was mainly challenging epistemology. For the purpose of this thesis, this author will use the Proctor and Boal definition. After defining what agnotology is, in upcoming chapter the ignorance and agnotology will be used interchangeably.

selectively ignored the knowledge of the peoples they conquered (Mayor 2008; Schiebinger 2008). Proctor (2008) argues that academic discourse has disproportionately focused on epistemology, thereby overlooking the critical importance of examining “the conscious, unconscious, and structural production of ignorance, its diverse causes and conformations” (p. 3). To advance this line of inquiry, he proposes a typology of ignorance consisting of three specific categories: ignorance as a native state (or resource), ignorance as a lost realm (or selective choice), and ignorance as a deliberately engineered and strategic ploy (or active construct).

This typology by Proctor (2008) is central to the purpose of this study. The final two types are of particular importance as this study explores mechanisms that digital platforms use to manipulate public opinion, spread disinformation, and censor or suppress voices intentionally or covertly. Before delving into details, it is crucial to first distinguish between different taxonomies and theories of ignorance and agnotology. This is important because the application of ignorance is not static across various academic fields, regardless of the limited literature that exists. As pointed out by Jennifer L. Croissant (2014), the presence of various contrasting terms and connotations as well as the vast interdisciplinary scholarship on the topic can at times lead one to confusion and complexity in studying ignorance. Furthermore, the plethora of definitions that one encounters concerning ignorance indicates that, unless they are in the same field, there is none to minimal interaction between different authors and their works. For instance, the literature on the epistemology of ignorance does not engage with arguments and insights from agnotology. As such, the aim of this section is to put the work of different authors in dialogue in an attempt to develop a comprehensive understanding of ignorance as a scientific field of inquiry.

1.3.1. On the Taxonomies and Uses of Ignorance

Ignorance is generated through myriad ways and can take various shapes, from secrecy to stupidity, apathy, censorship, and disinformation (Proctor 2008, p.2). It is closely related to other concepts that feature prominently in the political and social sciences, including silence, uncertainty, ambiguity, taboo and risk (Proctor, 2008; Croissant,

2014). Some of the technical terms that have emerged are *nichtwissen*, non-knowledge, and negative knowledge, and later agnotology. Each of these concepts represents different aspects of ignorance, and understanding their nuances helps in grasping the broader implications of agnotology. The following table provides a comparative overview to clarify these distinctions.

Table 1. A Categorization of Different Unknowns and Agnotology

	<i>Nichtwissen</i> Non-Knowledge	Negative Knowledge	Agnotology
Definition	Absence of information or awareness	misleading information less interesting, feared realm	Culturally induced ignorance or doubt, often through deliberate means
Example	Unexplored scientific questions, unknown phenomena	Urban myths, pseudoscience, debunked theories	Tobacco industry's misinformation, climate change denial
Implications	Neutral, often spurs curiosity and research	Can lead to misunderstandings , perpetuation of false beliefs	Maintains social, political, or economic advantage; hampers progress
Intent	No intent, naturally occurring gaps in knowledge	Unintentional or intentional spread of false information	Intentional manipulation or suppression of information

For example, as described in the previous section of this chapter, the German term *nichtwissen* is the equivalent of “nonknowledge” Following the development of

nichtwissen by Simmel, the concept was utilized by Bösch and Wehling for a “sociology of nonknowledge,” or other alternative term nescience (total ignorance) to “frame the unknown so that the unknown can be taken into account in future” (Gross 2007, 751; Smithson, 2008, p. 202). In other words, the non-knowledge approach looks for gaps in knowledge, things not yet discovered or understood, either fully or partially.

Non-knowledge analysis is situated within the framework of reflexive modernity, or alternatively within Beck’s (1992) *Risk Society* as mentioned above. Within the latter, society becomes increasingly aware of the limitations and potential dangers of scientific and technological progress (Gross, 2007, p.745). Alongside scholars such as Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, well-known sociologist George Simmel, has dedicated a good portion of his work to the study of *nichtwissen*. Simmel posits that ignorance is endemic to all fields of social life (Simmel 1992). That being said, the problem with this specific term arises once it is translated into English. As stated in Table 1, the German term *nichtwissen* denotes the possibility or existence of knowledge about the unknown, while nescience indicates “absence or lack of knowledge” (Gross 2007, p. 746). This situation creates an asymmetry between the words. Since nescience denotes a total ignorance, Gross (2007, p.746) argues that it can only be used in retrospect. This is because one cannot talk about their own current nescience as it is not part of their consciousness, nor of socially constructed non-knowledge. Non-knowledge, on the other hand, is a term that is used by German-speaking authors. While it is rarely used in the English language, it seems to be the literal and somewhat closest translation to *nichtwissen* (Gross, 2007, p.746).

There are other scholars who do not believe that it is useful to form ignorance as a central category in social scientific research. Nico Stehr (2012) for instance, argues that non-knowledge or ignorance is difficult to grasp because it does not exist in an absolute sense: “Why is non-knowledge difficult to grasp? Because there is no such thing as non-knowledge.” He points out the complexity and contextual dependency of knowledge in a modern society, asserting that since total transparency and complete knowledge are unattainable, every individual and society operates under some

conditions of selective ignorance, even useful, allowing society to function without overburdening individuals with information they do not need. Consequently, Stehr (2012) advocates for the use of more productive terminology to reorient the focus toward the unequal distribution and processes of knowledge production, rather than its mere absence. Stehr's arguments are grounded on the idea of highly “specialized” and “differentiated” society prevalent in the context of early modernity discourse where, as Will Rogers once stated, “everybody is ignorant, only on different subjects” (Ungar 2008). Nonetheless, Stehr’s approach is reductionist when considering that non-knowledge is broad in its scope, encompassing various forms of uncertainty, ambiguity, and other forms of unknown that emerge in the process of knowledge production (Gross 2007) and can have hazardous effects. Gross contends that non-knowledge is a specified ignorance of a discipline, a knowledge based on presumed existence for a “known unknown.” As outlined earlier, certain forms of ignorance are by-products or after-effects of knowledge processes. The pursuit of nuclear energy, which was initially celebrated for its promise of limitless clean power, inadvertently created significant ignorance about the long-term environmental and health risks, a reality tragically underscored by disasters like Chernobyl and Fukushima.

In discussions concerning the unknown, the terms *ignorance* and *non-knowledge* are often used as umbrella concepts to describe various states of not knowing. These include the absence of knowledge, probabilistic uncertainty, inaccuracy, and irrelevance (Smithson, 1989; 2008; Stocking, 1998). Faber and Proops (1998) differentiate non-knowledge from risk and uncertainty by emphasizing that, in the case of risk, probabilities are fully known, while in uncertainty, probabilities are partially known. Non-knowledge, however, refers to a "realm that escapes recognition" (Gross, 2007), indicating a domain beyond measurable uncertainty.

Additionally, Funtowicz and Ravetz (1990) provide a classification of uncertainty into three levels: inexactness, unreliability, and ignorance. Among these, ignorance represents the most profound form of non-knowledge, extending beyond mere imprecision or doubtful information to a deeper, more fundamental lack of understanding.

Brian Wynne (1992) has a different view, he asserts that risk pertains “the system behavior is basically well known, and chances of different outcomes can be defined and quantified by structured analysis of mechanisms and probabilities.” Wynne disagrees with Funtowicz and Ravetz’s idea that uncertainty can be placed on a linear scale from risk to ignorance (Gross, 2007). Instead, he suggests that risk, uncertainty, and ignorance are overlapping and interconnected, suggesting that ignorance could be an intrinsic component within other unknowns (Gross, 2007).

Knorr Cetina (1999) introduces the term “negative knowledge” to the collections of other technical terms. Departing from the discussions about non-knowledge, which is void of knowing, or known unknown, that is in the system, either probabilistic or uncertain; negative ignorance addresses knowledge of the “limits of knowing, of the mistakes we make in trying to know, of the things that interfere with our knowing, of what we are not interested in and do not really want to know’ (Knorr Cetina, 1999). This strategy Gross (2007) posits can “lead to an acknowledgment of non-knowledge that so far has been neglected but is suddenly taken seriously and may even be seen as fundamental.” Gross (2007) describes negative knowledge as “knowledge about what is not known but considered as not worth being dealt with.” The idea of negative knowledge is important in understanding how organizations work. Bureaucrats often turn down extra resources if they feel they cannot effectively manage or implement the new policies these resources would require (McGoey, 2012). Calling these new resources unnecessary or irrelevant helps them meet targets or quotas that are out of their control. In this way, ignorance can become a safe haven for staff who are overwhelmed by the demands of new information and responsibilities.

Various scholars from different fields have proposed a wide range of distinctions and taxonomies for different forms of ignorance. One of the most popular distinctions is “absence versus distortion,” or “reducible versus irreducible ignorance,” suggested by Knorr Cetina and Faber and Proops in negative knowledge (Smithson, 2008). Several disciplines have produced effective distinctions between different kinds of ignorance and uncertainty, including schools of probability theory that have proposed different kinds of mathematical uncertainty measures such as fuzzy set theory and belief

function. This, however, has raised a concern among other scholars like Brown and Rogers (1991) about any attempts on defining or classifying ignorance. They argue that any attempt at classification “uncouples phenomena from their context, thereby sacrificing interpretive richness.” However, as per scientific research criteria, classification and definitions are an inevitable part of knowledge production processes. So far, the most coherent and consistent taxonomy of ignorance is the one suggested by Proctor under *agnotology*—the culturally induced ignorance.

Proctor (2008) simplifies the infinite formations of ignorance by boiling them down into three categories: “Ignorance as *native state* (or resource)” which denotes a natural state of not knowing about everything that there is, given the limited capacity of human comprehension and the vastness of knowledge, there is always something out there in the world that one will not know about (Proctor, 2008). “Ignorance as *lost realm* (or selective choice),” ignorance in this second form can be a passive construct and come about as a result of selection of certain lines of research over others. Hence, here ignorance emerges from the combination of decisions, circumstances and accidents that surround practices of knowledge production (Proctor, 2008; Greyson, 2018). And finally, ignorance that is “deliberately engineered and *strategic ploy* or active construct” (Proctor, 2008; McGoe, 2020). The third form of ignorance, and most important to Proctor, is the deliberate construction, maintenance, and manipulation of ignorance, doubt, or uncertainty through diverse disciplines (Proctor and Schiebinger 2008). The authors challenge the conventional perception of ignorance as a mere informational void, advocating for an understanding that frames it as an actively engineered component within specific plans or agendas. Instances such as the exploration of trade secrets, tobacco agnotology, and military secrecy serve as concrete illustrations, highlighting how intentional efforts are made to strategically conceal knowledge. The authors contend that ignorance is not merely a passive lack of knowledge, but a consciously crafted element designed to serve particular purposes. The discourse extends to the historical and cross-cultural dimensions of secrecy, encompassing personal motives and broader societal contexts such as love, war, and business. This third category is where this author’s research is situated. This thesis will examine how giant tech companies such as Meta systematically suppress the voices of

“non-white” and marginalized groups by means of censorship and content moderation policies on both the micro- and macro- scale. It will further examine how companies deny this fact, and who ultimately benefits from this situation. This author terms the aforementioned form of strategic ignorance as “feigned ignorance” in order to illustrate how organizational agents or groups avoid responsibility while protecting and promoting their agendas. This thesis underlines the artificiality of its conception and its deliberate imposition.

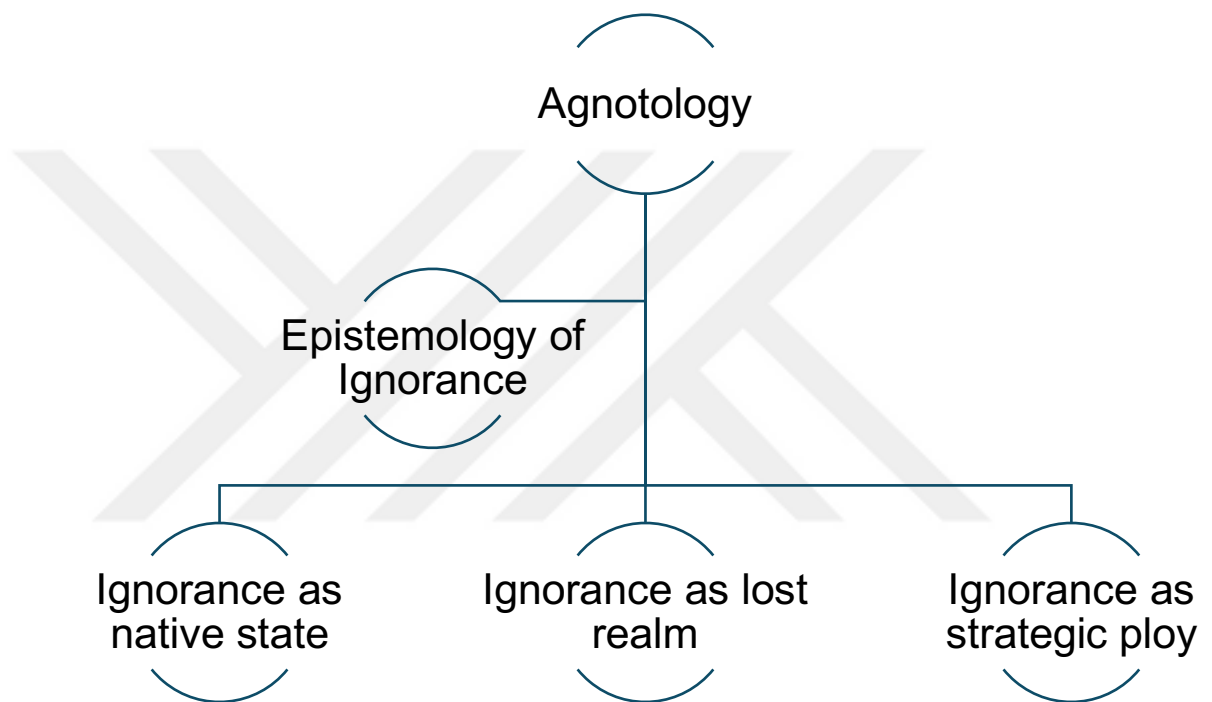


Figure 1. Mapping Agnotology

1.3.2. Ignorance as an Original State

As the original state under the philosophical account was discussed at the beginning of this chapter, this section will serve as a short overview of ignorance in the sense it is addressed by contemporary studies. It is important to distinguish strategic ignorance from selective and natural ignorance, which is perhaps one of the most common conceptions of the term and is typically viewed as a negative trait. Hence, Proctor’s

(2008) “native ignorance” should be understood as “a kind of deficit, caused by the naivete of youth or the faults of improper education—or the simple fact that here is a place where knowledge has not yet penetrated.” This state of being is ontological in nature; humans are born into ignorance, making it an inevitable condition. Natural ignorance can be characterized as an inherent, almost infantile lack of knowledge due to primitiveness—a void that is gradually filled through learning and development (Proctor 2008). In this context, ignorance is regarded as a valuable resource, or at the very least, a catalyst or stimulus necessary for continual advancement of scientific inquiry. According to Stuart Firestein (2012), ignorance is what drives inquiry, and students should learn to embrace their ignorance as an impetus for learning and discovery. He asserts that native ignorance is what “turns your crank, the very driving force of science, the exhilaration of the unknown” (Firestein 2012). While ignorance is not always necessarily evil, it is something to be “fought or overcome,” to put behind in the process of generating knowledge (Proctor, 2008).

Traditionally ignorance is likened to innocence or, in a secular context, to nascent knowledge. While philosophers like Socrates taught that true wisdom lies in recognizing the extent of one's own ignorance, marking the initial step on the path to enlightenment. Ignorance at times has overwhelmed others, turning them into a skeptic who believes knowledge is out of reach and “learning is ultimately futile” (DeNicola, 2017, p.4). In contrast, modernity views ignorance as a condition that can be eradicated, imbuing it with a sense of urgency as a void or hollow space that knowledge must occupy. Science endeavors to fill this void. However, Smithson (1985) contends that this approach to ignorance suffers from a naively “absolutist epistemology,” which assumes that there is only one correct way to think about anything (p.151). This is evident in the mainstream functionalist and Marxist accounts of ideology, which treat ideology as erroneous thought, with ‘science’ usually providing the template for correct thought” (Smithson, 1985, p.151).

Further, it is important to keep in mind that the negativity possessed by the term *ignorance* is not emptiness, since it holds within it the capacity for learning. As literary

critic Shoshana Felman argues, ignorance is not the opposite of knowledge, “it is itself a radical condition, an integral part of the very structure of knowledge” (Felman, 1982, p.29). Claims about this native form of ignorance are at the same time temporal, due to its generally remediable nature (DeNicola, 2017). Today, ignorance is of increasing concern. Looking only at the U.S., which is often considered to be home of one of the world’s most advanced and privileged populations, reveals an alarming scale of ignorance not only regarding geography or global history but also about internal political affairs and world events (Alcoff, 2007). This problem cannot be blamed on lack of knowledge or access to information, given that the present time is one of information explosion. In the present day, knowledge is under the tip of one’s fingers and only a click away. Although this universal ignorance, with its regenerative power, sustains the scientific enterprise, it does not provide a framework for diagnosing the current culture of ignorance—a culture increasingly fueled and amplified by the rise of new technologies.

1.3.4. Ignorance as Passive Construct

Ignorance, like knowledge, has a political geography, prompting us to ask: Who knows not? And why not? Where is there ignorance and why? Like knowledge or wealth or poverty, ignorance has a face, a house, and a price: it is encouraged here and discouraged there from ten thousand accidents (and deliberations) of social fortune (Proctor, 2008, p.6).

Ignorance as passive construct, lost realm, or selective choice, focuses on the intentional or unintentional omission of knowledge that yields social or political advantages. This category highlights the subtle or covert ways societies and individuals choose to ignore certain information, often resulting in significant implications. Proctor (2008) suggests that “part of this idea is that inquiry is always selective. We look *here* rather than *there*...ignorance is a production of inattention, and since we cannot study all things, some by necessity – almost all, in fact – must be

left out” (Proctor, 2008, p.7). According to Greyson (2018), science and learning are path-dependent and the decision to pursue one path means overlooking another area of study. While it is true that one’s capacity, time, and resources cannot possibly facilitate them to master all sciences, what one chooses is just as dependent on external factors as it is internal factors. These pathways are shaped by multitude of forces including funding opportunities, power dynamics, market trends, the individual and collective interests of learners, and societal influences, “determining which realms of knowledge are lost by virtue of selection of other priorities” (Greyson, 2018, p.413). Knowledge production practices are always embedded in a broader matrix of historical changes, political economy, and culturally shaped epistemic preferences among “researchers and funders that create the conditions for a pattern in which some research programs gain favor and others become marginalized or even forgotten” (Hess, 2023, p.168). This dynamic makes it hard to draw a clear line between ignorance as passive construct and ignorance as strategic ploys/active construct as Proctor (2008) suggests. Both categories are interrelated, mutually supportive and reinforcing each other. When a choice is made, it is often influenced by another force that strategically promotes that decision. For instance, ignorance can be systematically produced through social media, where users opt to click on, read, and accept false information that has been deliberately crafted for their consumption (Rose and Bartoli, 2019).

In his 2023 work ““Undone Science and Social Movements,” David J. Hess highlights how valuable scientific research and alternative approaches, advocated by experts, often remain undone due to lack of funding or selectivity in their research fields. His investigation on the problem of lack of funding for research on various approaches to the treatment of chronic diseases revealed that research priorities are not solely driven by internal dynamics but are significantly influenced by dominant societal actors, such as large industrial corporations, the military, and the "right hand of the state" (Hess, 2023, p.168). Even though technical criteria such as consistency, evidence, and attention to methodological standards were important, these criteria were not always applied in a fair or even manner and could be utilized in the service of “maintaining a set of dominant research programs in a field” (Hess, 2023, p.168). As such, ignorance studies classified as a lost realm or selective choice fall into the category of known

unknowns rather than unknown unknowns. In other words, there was a conscious decision not to investigate or generate knowledge, often for political or social gain. Additionally, the concept of “white ignorance,” as explored by Mills (2007), highlights how racial biases lead to the selective overlooking of historical and contemporary injustices faced by people of color, maintaining racial hierarchies and social inequalities.

Schiebinger’s (2008) work examines how valuable knowledge can be lost due to deliberate choices, using the example of abortifacients. She explains that “abortifacients...represent a body of knowledge and set of techniques that did not transfer from the New World into Europe. Knowledge ignored in the eighteenth century was by the nineteenth century largely forgotten” (p.145). During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, European doctors, primarily white men, chose to ignore the use of West Indian abortifacients like the peacock flower. At that time abortion was not illegal, and various abortive methods were in use. However, knowledge of these herbal remedies was not suppressed by law but was simply overlooked and eventually forgotten. For instance, “abortion, like much female medicine, traditionally belonged to the domain of midwifery. Much knowledge of abortion was lost in the shift in the management of birthing in [the 18th century] away from midwives to professionalized obstetricians” (Schiebinger, 2008, p.152). This work illustrates how historical omissions in botanical knowledge, influenced by colonial and gender biases, have led to a significant loss of valuable knowledge that midwives had, as the new professional obstetricians did not transfer or adopt these techniques. The deliberate choice not to share this knowledge caused it to fade into obscurity, highlighting how selective ignorance can lead to the loss of important information. These omissions are not always intentional but are reinforced by existing power structures and socio-cultural dynamics, demonstrating how passive constructs of ignorance can have long-lasting impacts (Schiebinger, 2008).

1.3.5. Deliberate Construction of Ignorance

Just as a wall marking the boundary of my property may be erected by me or by my neighbour, so my ignorance may be shielded through my own deliberate construction or through the works of others. (DeNicola, 2017, p.79)

Aristotle opens his philosophical inquiry in *Metaphysics* by asserting that “all men by nature desire to know” (1998). It is human curiosity that this claim refers to, or humanity persistently striving to uncover the workings of the universe, seeking knowledge about its role within it, and pursuing ideals of morality and beauty. However, Aristotle, in the above statement touches upon the cognitive dissonance inherent in the idea of *choosing* ignorance, which seems to contradict the natural human desire for knowledge. He complicates this traditional view by introducing the possibility of intentional ignorance. The study of the social construction of ignorance, as outlined by Fernández Pinto (2015, p.55), has two primary features. First, it is constructivist, meaning it examines how ignorance is intentionally manufactured and emphasizes the need to study and address this phenomenon. Second, it views ignorance from a social perspective. It is “not concerned with the individual knower, but with the social circumstances that encourage the production of ignorance” (Pinto, 2015, p.55) Engineered ignorance has been studied by scholars from many different fields, leading to the emergence of a myriad of terms for their specific case of ignorance including feigned ignorance, contrived ignorance, offensive and defensive ignorance (Gold & Stel, 2022). Regardless of the many different phrases used across literature, one common denominator that links them all to the general theory of agnotology is the fact that foundationally none of these works define ignorance as native. It is rather strategic, articulated as something that is constructed, made, or maintained, or selected by choice. Although the study of agnotology is not limited to studies of “commercially driven science,” Proctor’s research (1995, 2008, pp. 8-18) on the tobacco industry's funding of cancer research has been crucial in revealing how ignorance is generated in industry-sponsored science. Similarly, the work of Oreskes and Conway (2010) on climate change as well as Michaels's (2008) analysis of the chemical industry have also been pivotal in documenting these mechanisms. As such, this thesis specifically draws on strands of ignorance studies that are grounded on the

political and corporate institutions' functionality of ignorance. It does so by investigating what actors claim not to know, what mechanisms they use to back their claim and who is benefited or harmed in the process (McGoey 2012; Proctor 2008; Smithson 1985,1989). Additionally, the analytical concept of "states of denial," as described by Stanley Cohen (2011), is crucial for this project. It will assist the reader to understand a scenario where A claims that B is feigning ignorance based on X evidence, while B denies the accusation by deliberate use of strategic tactics. Cohen (2011) argues that "statements of denial are assertions that something did not happen, does not exist, is not true or is not known about" (p.4). To understand the nature of denial, Cohen investigates who is the agent of denial, what is the level of denial (personal, official, cultural), or whether it is 1) literal denial, (it didn't happen); 2) interpretive denial (it happened, but its meaning is different than it appears); 3. implicatory denial (it has happened, but its significance is different than it appears) (Cohen, 2011, p.22). Denial has been a powerful tool throughout history in the hands of both powerful actors and lay people. It is a means by which a person protects themselves from the consequences of their actions, as noted in a plethora of instances by the field of criminology. Proctor's agnotology as a strategic ploy is specifically related to the study of agnogenesis, or "the process of generating or maintaining ignorance – tracing its agential dimensions and studying how it becomes institutionalized" (Proctor 2008, p.7; Gould and Stel 2022).

The concept of strategic ignorance reveals the multiple dimensions of non-knowing. On the one hand, social actors including individuals, communities, groups, or organizations protect or maintain their own ignorance. On the other hand, they manufacture the ignorance of others (Smithson, 2008, p.211). McGoey highlights the value of strategic ignorance as an organizational resource, since it involves *intentionally* avoiding certain knowledge to protect oneself from legal *liability*, maintain "plausible deniability," or manage *information flows* within organizations (McGoey, 2012, pp.553-559). Hence, agnotology is not concerned with individual ignorance, but rather with collective or socially salient ignorance. As discussed above, ignorance has many typologies and theories that can be helpful in different cases; however, for the purpose of this thesis the following area few questions that can assist

readers in distinguishing agnotological studies from other forms and theories of ignorance.

1. Does the study specifically examine the intentional creation or maintenance of ignorance by individuals or institutions/organizations?
2. Is it the people in power who are benefiting politically, economically, or socially from such ignorance?
3. Are the actors using deliberate tactics or mechanisms to manufacture ignorance (by censoring or suppressing information, spreading false news or disinformation, propaganda, generating doubt or uncertainty, etc)?
4. Who is affected (oppressed, controlled, manipulated, or violated) as a result of this ignorance (general public, marginalized group or community, individuals)?

It is important to understand that ignorance, like knowledge, can be a “tool of governance and usurpation” (McGoey, 2012, p.10). In their examination of *Strategic Ignorance and the Legitimation of Remote Warfare*, Gould and Stel (2022) employ the dual concepts of “defensive” and “offensive” ignorance to illuminate how state actors strategically manage knowledge and ignorance in order to legitimize remote military engagements. Their study critically examines the aftermath of the 2015 Hawija bombardments in Iraq, part of Operation Inherent Resolve, which resulted in over 70 civilian casualties. By deploying various forms of strategic ignorance ranging from “denial to secrecy and deliberate unknowing” (Gould & Stel, 2022, p.57), Dutch officials sought to control the narrative surrounding these casualties, effectively sidestepping accountability.

Gould and Stel categorize this tactic as ‘defensive ignorance,’ which involves the intentional preservation of ignorance to deflect responsibility. This phenomenon is exemplified in scenarios where actors “could have known but chose not to, resisting rather than pursuing knowledge” (Gould & Stel, 2022, p. 63). Tactics such as ignoring inconvenient data, shelving key reports, or failing to ask critical questions are all emblematic of defensive ignorance. For instance, Dutch authorities’ claims of

ignorance about the civilian toll functioned as a shield, protecting political and military leadership from both public criticism and legal consequences (Gould & Stel, 2022, p. 67). This act of non-knowing is not simply about avoiding blame but also about shaping how the public perceives remote warfare—presenting it as precise, ethically sound, and risk-free.

‘Offensive ignorance,’ by contrast, refers to how authorities actively *impose* ignorance on others. This often involves curtailing access to information by invoking security concerns, obstructing freedom of information requests, or preventing investigations. In the Hawija case, Dutch officials limited transparency and controlled the narrative by withholding critical information about the incident. Gould and Stel (2022) suggest that this imposition of ignorance was not only about controlling public perception but also about reinforcing state narratives that frame remote warfare as a sanitized and morally justified form of conflict.

The strategic manipulation of ignorance, Gould and Stel (2022) argue, serves to sustain the legitimacy of remote military operations by maintaining the illusion of ethical warfare. This technique is especially effective because unlike explicit denial or secrecy, ignorance remains “elusive and open-ended.” These qualities render it a politically expedient tool for avoiding accountability (Gould & Stel, 2022). As they succinctly put it, “maintained and professed forms of authorities’ defensive ignorance offensively shape the components of the regimes of truth” (p. 64), influencing societal frameworks of knowing and unknowing. By managing what is known and what is concealed, state actors affect the mechanisms through which truth is discerned and contested, thus preserving the moral justifications of contentious military actions.

McGoey’s (2019) concept of “strategic ignorance” provides further insight, emphasizing how “elite power functions through strategic ignorance—the ability to select which voices to acknowledge and which to dismiss.” This selective acknowledgment of truth is a powerful tool, highlighting the ways in which knowledge production and dissemination are inextricably linked to political and social power structures. This case is highly relevant to the theoretical framework of this project, as it exemplifies the power dynamics involved in determining what should be known or

not known. Moreover, it underscores the importance of understanding how new technologies—whether in warfare or communication—are developed and deployed within these broader socio-political contexts. The deliberate construction and imposition of ignorance are as much a tool of contemporary governance as the weapons employed in remote warfare.

1.3.5.1. Doubt is Our Product

Many studies have explored how ignorance is manufactured through uncertainty and doubt (Smithson, 1989; Proctor, 2008; Oreskes and Conway; 2008). In his exploration of the tobacco industry, Proctor (2008) asserts that “no one has done so more effectively than the tobacco mongers, the masters of fomenting ignorance to combat knowledge” (p.10) The industry meticulously cultivated uncertainty about the health risks of smoking, despite the overwhelming scientific evidence available since the 1950s. They deliberately sowed doubt by hiring scientists to challenge established research findings, effectively manipulating public perception and perpetuating ignorance (Michaels, 2008, p. 31). The primary goal of the tobacco industry was to create doubt about the health accusations regarding tobacco products without outright rejecting them (Proctor, 2008, p.15). As stated by officials Brown and Wilson, “doubt was the tobacco industry’s product.” For example, the formation of “The Tobacco Industry Research Committee” in 1953 and the release of “A Frank Statement” a year later were pivotal in spreading misleading information. The industry launched a big campaign to “reassure consumers that the hazard had not yet been ‘proven.’” The point was to keep the question of tobacco’s health hazards open for as long as possible. The industry's defense against lawsuits relied on two main strategies: claiming there was “no proof” of health risks and asserting that the dangers were common knowledge, thus making smokers responsible for their illnesses. They maintained this controversy by feigning ignorance of dangers and affirming a lack of conclusive scientific evidence, while actively manufacturing public ignorance. Their tactics included concealing known hazards, funding misleading research, and producing confident but false assertions through the Tobacco Institute. Additionally, they disseminated the Tobacco and Health Report to physicians and opinion makers, emphasizing various

cancer causes to divert attention from tobacco. “Cancer, after all, was a complex disease with multiple causes, all of which would have to be explored without rushing to any kind of judgment” (Proctor 2008). Proctor's work revealed how the tobacco industry framed well-supported scientific facts as debatable, thus maintaining public uncertainty about the connection between smoking and cancer (Proctor, 2008, 9-12). This included undermining epidemiological data, questioning the applicability of animal studies, and stressing the complexity of cancer causes. Their main objective was to keep the public confused and protect their profits. Same as knowledge, ignorance can also be power, and the tactic of manufacturing doubt has since been adopted by other sectors like asbestos and fossil fuels, highlighting its lasting impact on public health and environmental policies. For instance, Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway (2008) work demonstrates another example of instrumentalization of doubt in the case of climate warming. Their study shed light on the politicization of science and how it was delegitimized to maintain the conservative party’s agenda. Although there has been a plethora of scientific evidence and consensus since the 1990s to empirically prove that “anthropogenic global warming” has happened, conservative think tanks, especially the George C. Marshall Institute², constantly attacked the “uncertainty” of evidence and models. From 1989 to 2003, retired physicist S. Fred Singer continuously wrote on rationale to deny climate change (Oreskes and Conway, 2008). The Marshall Institute, where he published his work, aimed to convince public opinion through mass media campaigns, to accept interpretations that diverged from mainstream scientific consensus (Oreskes and Conway 2008). This example depicts a similar scenario of the climate change denial industry attempting to generate “doubt” and “uncertainty” around widely accepted scientific findings, and to create “something that sounds like science” to let them advance their own interests (Michaels 2008).

² The Marshall Institute's main focus was on policy issues like national defense strategies and the tobacco industry, however, their most prolific attack was against the idea of climate change. They were also responsible for the messaging behind denying acid rain and ozone depletion, denying the hazards of tobacco products, and constructing fake messaging in favor of Ronald Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), a national defense strategy that was strongly opposed by academic scientists at the time. The institute got dissolved in 2015. For more on the Institute’s influence on public policy and manufactured uncertainty, see: Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, “Challenging Knowledge: How Climate Science Became a Victim of the Cold War,” in *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*, ed. Robert N. Proctor and Londa Schiebinger (Stanford University Press, 2008), 55-89.

1.3.6. Collective Amnesia?

Shannon Sullivan (2017) navigates the production of ignorance by asking why white U.S. citizens know so little about Puerto Rico, or the construction of “Porto Rico” as the “object of colonialist ignorance/knowledge” (p.6) She contends that the reason many white Americans are ignorant of Puerto Rico's connection to the U.S. is because of historical narratives that have circulated to control ignorance and knowledge making. She uses this term because “it denies, or at least places under suspicion, the purported self-master and self-transparency of knowledge, as if nothing properly escaped its grasp” (p.154). In 1898, following Puerto Rico's annexation by the U.S., Sullivan argues that a deliberate strategy was employed to shape American perceptions of the island. This strategy involved constructing a narrative that selectively controlled what Americans knew and understood about Puerto Rican life and culture. This manufactured ignorance was not simply a lack of knowledge but rather a deliberate replacement with a distorted form of knowledge that served American imperial interests. By portraying Puerto Rico as “less exotic” compared to other territories like the Philippines, the United States sought to assimilate Puerto Ricans into a broader myth of American identity and influence in the Americas. Sullivan demonstrates the specific role education played in perpetuating ignorance/knowledge in how Puerto Ricans become Americanized, masculinized versions of themselves, even to themselves due to the education they received from their colonizers (Sullivan, 2017). Hence, as Frantz Fanon observes in his *Black Skin, White Masks*, deliberate ignorance not only shapes distorted narratives about the people of color, but also leaves enduring imprints on the psyche of colonized individuals. He further contends that the White People have created a “massive psycho-existential complex” which in other words is a manufactured self-ignorance to the extent that the real nature of black identity is itself a difficult project to grasp (Fanon, 1986, p.14). This is why Fanon wants to liberate black man from himself. Fanon asserts that ignorance and misinformation are to blame for many ills of the postcolonial world and that science should be ashamed of itself for providing intellectual legitimacy to the white racial project (Fanon, 1986, p.120). This doesn't mean Fanon promotes a non-scientific approach to society, but he

is of the belief that like ignorance, certain forms of knowledge could be equally dangerous.

Complementing Sullivan's analysis, Basma Fahoum and Arie M. Dubnov (2023) employ historiographical agnotology, which they define as "a form of public discourse emanating from ideological, institutional, and structural pressures, resulting in a state of not knowing" (p.374). Their work analyzes the systematic suppression of the Tantura massacre and treatment of the Jewish Israeli student Teddy Katz's thesis submitted to Haifa University in 1998 on the event. The case study revolves around the 1948 massacre at the Palestinian village of Tantura, where Israeli forces "committed horrendous war crimes, including mass executions, with estimates ranging between 40 and 250 dead. The bodies were said to have been buried in a mass grave under a parking lot of the nearby beach at Dor, now a popular tourist destination, built on the ruins of Tantura" (p.372).

Teddy Katz's master's thesis, which thoroughly documented these war crimes through oral testimonies, was annulled in 2000, twenty years later after an Israeli journalist published his findings on a well-known daily newspaper, leading to outrage and heated debates. A libel suit was filed against him by some veterans from Alexandroni Brigade, forcing Katz to withdraw all implications of massacre and unarmed killings from his thesis, issuing a formal apology for the accusations (Fahoum and Dubnov 2023). The authors argue that Katz's thesis was targeted because it threatened the dominant Zionist narrative by exposing a historical atrocity which contradicted the official story of Israel's founding. This further leads them to contemplate on "how the hegemonic narrative, often portrayed as the 'truth' in Israel, eclipses, distorts, and silences Palestinian narratives," which they term "state-sponsored amnesia" (Fahoum and Dubnov, 2023, p.372). Hence, this silencing resulted in an "academically manufactured agnotology: a categorical cancelling out of victim testimonies in the name of rigorous academic standards" (375). This agnotology, Fahoum and Dubnov (2023) posits, is not a form of denialism. Giving the example of how all Israeli Jews had heard about the *Nakba* and events of 1948 but from a yet another Israelis' perspective, pointing out how the identity of the one telling the story is of crucial

importance, or as Foucault's (1972; 1975) "regimes of truth" suggests, both knowledge and truth are products of power structures of the society, the "military, political, institutional, and cultural pressures...predetermines who is permitted to tell the story and how, who has access to information, and who limits what one can and should know" (Fahoum and Dubnov, 2023, p.377). One can observe an asymmetric state of affairs reflected by agnotology in this case, where state-sponsored archives are mostly accessible for Israelis while Palestinians are deprived of such institutional support. Historian Rosemary Sayigh observes until recently, this disparity created a paradox where the Nakba—the forced displacement and dispossession of almost 80 percent of Palestinians from their lands in 1948—was experienced by Palestinians but insufficiently recorded. They were mostly "transmitted orally and seldom published, making early Israeli filtering relatively easy." (Fahoum and Dubnov, 2023, p.378) Despite this, oral traditions among Palestinians helped preserve a collective memory of the Nakba that includes atrocities like the Tantura massacre. Muhammad Nimr al-Khatib's early account in "Min Athar al-Nakba" (1951) and subsequent testimonies by Yahya al-Yahya and Mustafa al-Wali illustrate how Palestinians documented their own history despite challenges. This oral history was crucial in maintaining a Palestinian narrative that did not require external validation by historians to be legitimate or recognized. Fahoum and Dubnov (2023) contend that the core issue lies not in a deficiency of information or the silence of Palestinians, but rather in an Israeli filtering system that systematically undermines Indigenous testimonies. This mechanism has fostered a paradigm of "top-down" academic agnotology, wherein Israeli historians employ a methodical approach to delegitimize "bottom-up" Palestinian narratives by assigning greater authority to written sources. They further illustrate how this "top-down" agnotology perpetuates colonial epistemologies, with Jewish historians positioned as authoritative representatives of "science" and "truth." In contrast, Palestinians are often characterized through the lens of "Oriental imagination," depicted as prone to "fantasy" and accused of exaggeration in their accounts (Fahoum & Dubnov, 2023, p.382).

1.3.7. Epistemologies of Ignorance

In his seminal work, *The Racial Contract*, Charles W. Mills explores the concept of white ignorance, intricately entwined with white supremacy. Mills defines white ignorance as encompassing both false beliefs and the absence of accurate beliefs about people of color, reinforcing a delusion of white racial superiority that transcends individuals' racial backgrounds (Mills 2007). This form of ignorance operates through a unique social cognition, distorting the perception of reality. Individuals, particularly influenced by white supremacy, perceive the world through a lens that shapes the biased view of whites. Mills argues that the impact of white ignorance extends beyond individual cognition, permeating social and collective memory. It contributes to the neglect of achievements by people of color and the historical atrocities committed by white individuals. This “collective amnesia” about the past, according to Mills, fosters hostility toward the testimonies and credibility of non-white individuals (Mills, 2007, p.29). After all, the “White Man's Burden”—historically, associated with colonization and imperialism—was to “civilize” the barbaric, the savage. It was the idea that Western civilization has a moral responsibility to “civilize” non-Western societies that justified imperialistic expansion. The process of “civilizing” often entailed imposing Western values, eradicating local cultures, and perpetuating a narrative of Western superiority. Hence, manufacturing ignorance emerged as a characteristic of Western civilization, sustaining a distorted worldview, and rationalizing imperialistic pursuits. From a Foucauldian perspective, ignorance is part of the knowledge production process. Foucault’s archaeological approach to knowledge sets out to uncover discursive struggles and excavate “subjugated knowledge,” which are knowledge that are disqualified or dismissed by dominant, standard, and sanctioned discourses (Foucault, 2003). Agnotology pursues similar endeavors but places the accent more explicitly on the practices and politics that exclude, delay, suppress, deny, erase, or marginalize some forms or sources of knowledge (Proctor and Schiebinger, 2008).

1.4. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, ignorance has been explored through its deep historical, philosophical, and cultural contexts, revealing its persistent role in shaping human understanding. From Socratic recognition of the limits of knowledge to modern thinkers like Ulrich Beck (1999) and Robert Proctor (2008), ignorance is no longer seen merely as an absence of knowledge but as a strategic construct, often employed for economic, political, and societal purposes. Agnotology, as the study of culturally induced ignorance, highlights how powerful entities, such as the tobacco industry, have actively manipulated information to obscure truths (Proctor, 2008). Similarly, epistemic discussions around “white ignorance” and “colonial knowledge” have illustrated how systemic biases perpetuate selective omissions and distorted realities, reinforcing structures of inequality.

Traditional agnotology is largely rooted in analog-era practices with limited engagement with the complexities of the digital world. As this chapter demonstrates, ignorance can be categorized in various forms—selective, passive, and constructed—each having significant implications for knowledge production and power dynamics. However, these forms fall short in addressing the evolving nature of ignorance within the digital age.

The following chapter builds on the foundation laid in Chapter I by introducing Agnotology 2.0, a framework that expands on traditional agnotology to explore how ignorance is produced and disseminated within the digital sphere. Digital platforms such as social media have transformed the mechanisms of ignorance production, adding new layers of complexity through algorithmic bias, digital censorship, and misinformation campaigns. The advent of technologies that govern information flows has reshaped the boundaries of knowledge, turning ignorance into an even more pervasive and invisible force.

This next phase of analysis will critically examine how ignorance in the digital age poses new challenges for democracy, social cohesion, and public understanding. By integrating this new framework, Agnotology 2.0 will provide a lens through which to study the role of algorithms and platforms like Meta in selectively amplifying or suppressing information. It will then analyse the ways in which these mechanisms contribute to the systemic production of ignorance. Thus, this chapter sets the stage for a deeper investigation into the digital infrastructures of power and the urgent need to confront ignorance in the online sphere.



CHAPTER II

AGNOTOLOGY 2.0 – MAPPING IGNORANCE IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL MEDIA

In the twenty-first century, the perpetuation of ignorance is significantly influenced by rapid technological progress, digitization, automation, big data, and opaque algorithms, all of which profoundly impact various areas of life and influence decision-making processes (Sardar, 2022, p.4). However, the discourse surrounding agnotology, as explored by Proctor (2008) and other scholars in the field (Smithson, 1989; Oreskes & Conway, 2010) tends to focus narrowly on science as the primary agent in the production of public ignorance, particularly through the manipulation of knowledge by corporations, industries, and private interests using scientific methods. This approach often overlooks the more pervasive and complex forms of ignorance that have emerged in the digital age, where fragmented and decentralized data-driven technologies increasingly shape the information landscape and public perception (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001; McIntyre, 2018; Labarre & Niculescu, 2022).

Although critical studies of traditional mass media is a well-established field that has long examined how media shapes public perception, knowledge, ideology, and power structures, these critiques (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944; Althusser, 1970; Herman & Chomsky, 1988) often focus on issues like propaganda, misinformation, media ownership, and media's effects on democratic processes. While crucial in understanding the "political economy" of media, they fail to address the diversity of media outlets and the evolving landscape of digital media. Whereas traditional media institutions were centralized, and hierarchical, digital platforms and social media in particular have introduced decentralized, user-driven networks where information spreads rapidly and unpredictably (Metzger, 2001, p.369). These changes have far-reaching implications for how mis- and dis-information is curated, shared, and

controlled, transitioning from a top-down model to one that appears democratic, yet is profoundly shaped by hidden mechanisms of users' control.

2.1. From Manipulated Consumers to Active Readers: Critical Media Theories

One of the seminal works in media studies is Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media* (1988). In this work they critically examine how mass media functions as an institutional mechanism in capitalist societies, enabling elites to propagate consent for policies and ideologies that serve their own interests via subtle and structured filtration systems that Herman and Chomsky term as the "propaganda model" (p.2). They identify five key components for this model:

- (1) the size, concentrated ownership, (2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; (3) the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and 'experts' funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; (4) 'flak' as a means of disciplining the media; and (5) anticommunism' as a national religion and control mechanism (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 2).

The propaganda model effectively demonstrates how media content is filtered, revealing the significant influence of media ownership and wealth inequalities on what is considered newsworthy, and what should/not gain attention. Herman and Chomsky argue that major media outlets, particularly "agenda-setting" institutions such as ABC, CBS, NBC, and prominent newspapers like *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, play a central role in shaping public discourse by selectively emphasizing certain topics and marginalizing others (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p.5). These outlets do more than inform; they frame discussions within a narrow ideological range that aligns with dominant political and corporate interests, often excluding radical or dissenting voices. While Herman and Chomsky highlight the nuanced ways mainstream media manipulates public perception, Alex Carey (1997) critiques the model for its limited focus, arguing that it overlooks the critical role of advertising and public relations in shaping media content. Despite its value in exposing media's alignment with capitalist power structures, the propaganda model's relevance is largely confined to centralized, traditional media systems in capitalist societies and particularly mainstream American media. With the rise of digital technologies and social media, content production and

dissemination have become more decentralized, enabling audiences to play an active role in generating and spreading information, thus complicating the once top-down flow of media influence. This shift challenges the applicability of the propaganda model in the digital age, where media manipulation is no longer solely the domain of corporate elites.

In a similar line, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1944), criticized mass media for reducing cultural products to homogenized, commodified forms, leading to passive consumption and fostering a society that uncritically accepted the status quo (p.14). Their concept of the “culture industry” illustrates how media manipulates public consciousness by creating false needs and desires, diverting attention away from real social and political issues (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944, pp.14-15). This approach is challenged by scholars like John Fiske (1987), who argue that audiences are not passive consumers of media but active interpreters of media texts (p.14). In *Television Culture*, Fiske suggests that media content is polysemic, meaning they can be read in multiple ways depending on the cultural and social context of the audience. He made the case that people as “readers” are able to make meaning out of the text, resisting dominant ideologies and produce alternative meanings from media content, emphasizing the dynamic nature of media interaction. Fiske stated that “a program becomes a text at the moment of reading, that is, when its interaction with one of its many audiences activates some of the meanings/pleasures that it is capable of provoking” (Fiske, 1987, p.14). This perspective challenges the deterministic views of media power put forth by Herman and Chomsky and further complicates Adorno and Horkheimer's approach by emphasizing the audience's active role in meaning-making and their ability to engage with media in ways that challenge, rather than merely reproduce, the status quo. While this approach offers a more nuanced understanding of media content and critiques the linear “sender/message/receiver” model, it may not fully apply to the new media environment, where audiences are involved in the process of content curation, and algorithmic filtering increasingly determines what content is seen or suppressed, narrowing the possibilities for alternative readings (Pasquale, 2015).

Approaching from a Marxist vantage point, Louis Althusser's theory of ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) illustrates how media functions as an institution akin to the economy and religion, producing the ideology of the ruling class (1970, p.143). He argues that the media not only informs but also interpolates individuals into accepting dominant ideologies as natural or inevitable: "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence... Ideology has a material existence" (Althusser, 1970, p.162). His account complements Herman and Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model by providing a structuralist explanation for how media systems shape public consent through dominant ideologies. While this structuralist approach corrects naive humanism, which may idealize or romanticize lived experiences without critically engaging with the power structures that shape them, Althusserian theory can lean too heavily toward formalism, neglecting the lived cultural forms or the everyday practices, experiences, and expressions that people engage in.

Stuart Hall (1973) critiques the 'theoreticist' descendants of structuralism, arguing that they overemphasize the power of representations and ideological forms in an abstract sense (p.62). These perspectives risk portraying ideology as all-encompassing, neglecting the agency and resistance inherent in everyday cultural practices. Hall views culture as a primary force that enables individuals to make sense of the world. This implies that culture, rather than being solely determined by ideological structures, is dynamic and capable of resistance, negotiation, and transformation. In his essay "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse," Hall (1973) presents a theoretical approach, contending that media communication is not a simple transmission of ideology but a process of "encoding and decoding." He argues that media messages are encoded with specific meanings by producers to align with certain ideologies. However, audiences do not accept these meanings passively (p.118). Traditional media perspectives depict the roles of "producers" and "consumers" as a neutral process of transferring media content, suggesting that meaning flows seamlessly between them without distortion or loss. In contrast, Hall posits that encoding, far from being a purely technical process, is imbued with intentionality, as producers deliberately shape media messages to manipulate and influence audience

perceptions. Nonetheless, Hall asserts that decoding, or how audiences interpret these messages, is influenced by their own cultural and socio-political contexts (p.119). Hall's work on encoding and decoding challenges both the deterministic tendencies of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Althusser, as well as Fiske's more optimistic view of audience agency, by recognizing that while media texts are imbued with ideological intent, the process of meaning-making is far more complex and mediated by individual and cultural factors (Hall, 1973, p.119). Although traditional media theories offer crucial insight into how power and ideology operate within mass communication, nonetheless, they were products of a more hierarchical and centralized context, where content was controlled by a small number of elite actors.

Furthermore, critical discourses on technology and mass media, often focus on the content or in Marshall McLuhan's (1964) terms, message of these mediums rather than their design, and the processes that govern these mediums. What is concerning here is not only the political economy of media as addressed by Herman and Chomsky, or the message that is manipulated, but the very nature of these technologies' designs and patterns and the pace and scale of changes they impose on societal structures and everyday life. In examining the foundational critiques offered by thinkers like Chomsky, Herman, Adorno, Horkheimer, Althusser, and Hall, it is clear that their frameworks are invaluable for grasping how media systems have historically shaped public perception, reinforced dominant ideologies, and maintain elite control over information. However, as one navigates today's digital landscape, these theories need to be revisited and re-evaluated. The emergence of digital platforms and data-driven, user generated content controlled by biased algorithms and filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011) calls for a more nuanced understanding of how knowledge/ignorance is cultivated through media in contemporary society. In his book *The Third Wave*, Alvin Toffler (1980) argues that in the post-industrial age the phenomenon of "consumerism" is transformed into "prosumers" (p.267), people who produce much of their goods and services themselves. Although Toffler's theory did not attract much attention at the time, his concept provides an interesting insight into the consumer behavior of the digital age society, where individuals are involved in almost all processes of production either completely or partially, both explicitly and covertly.

The linearity of information dissemination has been replaced with circular and globular modes of message diffusion wherein an individual is subjected to information overload or infobesity. This is the media that we are dealing with in the digital escape. We are not empowered enough to deal with this situation (Sanjeev, 2018, p.77).

In the past, traditional mass communication models involved a one-way flow of information—think of newspapers or TV broadcasts—where messages went from a single source to a largely passive audience. But, as Sanjeev (2018) points out, this model has evolved into a more “circular and globular” pattern. Nowadays, information doesn’t just flow top-down; it spreads across networks in multiple directions. Social media, for instance, allows people to share, reshape, and reframe content in real-time. This rapid flow of information has led to what Sanjeev (2018) called “infobesity,” which is a tidal wave of sensationalized, fragmented data, leading to cognitive overload (McIntyre, 2018, p.18; Matt & Fernandez, 2022, pp. 295-296). With so much content it becomes harder to filter through, make sense of what is trustworthy, and make informed decisions. While the global population now has unprecedented access to information, many individuals lack the tools or frameworks to navigate it effectively, leaving them vulnerable to manipulation by algorithms, targeted ads, and misinformation. Safiye O. Noble (2018) emphasizes the need to take a closer look at “what values are prioritized in such automated decision-making systems” (p.1), given how algorithms shape what one sees online.

As knowledge and information production and distribution is evolving rapidly, one must consider not only the persistent influence of these media (infra)structures but also the shifting dynamics of audience agency within these new contexts. McLuhan (1964) insightfully noted that technological advancements, such as airplanes, not only increased the speed of transportation but also “dissolved the railway form of city, politics, and association” (p.8). Similarly, digital communication technologies, while expanding access to information, have effects that go beyond their immediate functions, reshaping how people perceive the world, reality, and even their senses of identity. To address these changes and underscore the importance of an interdisciplinary approach this chapter introduces Agnotology 2.0, a framework that

highlights the shift in actors, mediums, and mechanisms involved in producing information and ignorance in contemporary digital cultures.

2.2. Towards A Theory of Digital Agnotology

The concept of Agnotology 2.0 is inspired by “Web 2.0,” a term introduced by Darcy DiNucci in her 1999 article “Fragmented Future” and later popularized by Tim O'Reilly in 2005. This term signifies a shift in the use and functionality of the internet. According to Anderson (2007), Web 2.0 is characterized by increased user interactivity, dynamic content, and social networking capabilities. This is in contrast to its predecessor, Web 1.0, which functioned primarily as a one-way medium with limited public participation. In Web 2.0, the internet became a “read-write” platform that facilitated “user-generated content and collaborative participation” (O'Reilly, 2005, p.1). Proctor’s (2008) exploration of the tobacco industry’s concerted efforts to obfuscate the well-established correlation between cigarette consumption and cancer underscores a deliberate and insidious deployment of doubt as a tool of manipulation. This strategy mirrors tactics seen in the discourse surrounding climate change, wherein confusion is systematically engineered to undermine scientific consensus (Kournay and Carrier, 2020, p.8). Both instances exemplify a form of informational control that is centrally organized, hierarchical, and localized, positioning consumers as passive recipients of distorted narratives and manipulated information. The critical works (i.e. Hemran and Chomsky, 1988) on traditional mass media, such as newspapers and television, have historically operated within similar frameworks. They function as instruments of elite propaganda which are monopolized by a concentrated few who dictate the parameters of public discourse. Agnotology 2.0, on the other hand, emerges in post-truth ground, a fragmented and decentralized media space where social media algorithms prioritize engagement over accuracy. This amplifies the spread of dis- or mis-information, deep fakes, and fake news which is propagated not only by powerful authorities but also disseminated by ordinary users and diffused through online networks (Langmia, 2023; Zuboff, 2019; Gillespie, Boczkowski, & Foot, 2014). This shift enables one to explore new layers of ignorance production in the digital sphere. As Sardar (2022) notes, digital spaces and big data, though they facilitate novel research, “incorporate as much indecent ignorance as decent information” (p.4). This

dynamic is especially evident in cases such as the 2016 U.S. presidential election and Covid-19, where falsehoods and disinformation spread rapidly through social media which has serious real-world consequences.

McIntyre (2018) argues that the post-truth condition “is an assertion of ideological supremacy by which its practitioners try to compel someone to believe in something whether there is good evidence for it or not,” (p.13). Furthermore, the mechanisms of Agnotology 2.0 are deeply connected with surveillance capitalism, where platforms like Instagram and Facebook exploit users’ privacy to create highly personalized content for maximizing engagement, often at the expense of truth (Zuboff, 2019, p.6). The way algorithms are designed maintains users' engagement on a platform by amplifying sensational content and creating filter bubbles and echo chambers. These mechanisms contribute to spread of ignorance by reinforcing users’ existing beliefs and biases and challenge the very core of an informed public discourse and rational decision making (Roberts, 2019, p.221; Pariser, 2011, p.10). In an environment where people are unaware of their own ignorance, it begs the question of whether discourse about free will and independent decision-making still holds validity. Questions such as this are posed not with the expectation of finding immediate answers within the limited scope of this thesis, but to spark deeper curiosity and inspire further inquiry. The deceptive nature of technology further blurs the line between fact and fiction, the pursuit of truth is undermined by the constant barrage of competing narratives. The rest of this chapter will explore how these new mechanisms of ignorance production operate, why Agnotology 2.0 is relevant, and its broader implications for society.

While investigating the political, economic, and social contexts of knowledge and ignorance production, agnotology raises critical questions about the reality of “who is being privileged and whose interests and needs are being addressed,” who is being excluded, and who is “systematically harmed by technological developments,” and “how we can resist these power relations” (Kempner, 2020, p.235). Traditional media such as newspapers, radio, and television which served as centralized and reliable sources of information between the 1950s and 1980s (McIntyre, 2018, pp. 85-95), The

decline of traditional media coupled with the initial rise of social media, facilitated by the internet, led to a new era of so-called decentralized, free-for-all information, and mass participation (McIntyre, 2018, pp.94-95). The discourse around social media and the internet often portray them as domains immune to conventional rules and norms governing social lives. Initially, this viewpoint evolved optimistically during the 1990s, encapsulated in what Barbrook and Cameron (1995) identified as the *Californian Ideology*, celebrating social media as a sign of democratization of discourse, of renewal of liberal freedoms, and one expanding cultural expression. In exploring the link between power and information technologies, McCarthy (2015) draws attention to two dominant strands of thought about information communication technologies (ICTs)³, namely: instrumentalist perspective and technological essentialism. Within international relations theory, he argues that “whether technological objects are viewed as neutral tools or as having inherent properties that cause social change, a deterministic technological rationale has been prominent in the field” (p.19).

2.2.1. Is Technology What We Make of It?

Technological instrumentalists view technology as neutral tools or instruments that serve as means to achieve predefined ends. As articulated by James Rosenau (2005), all technologies are “profoundly neutral,” until they are utilized by individuals or collectives who imbue it with specific values and purposes (p.78). However, this perspective, while addressing agency, fails to account for the ways in which technological objects are inherently shaped by the very social structures they aim to serve. For example, ICTs like the internet are seen not as predisposed to promote either democracy or autocracy but as tools whose effects are contingent upon how they are used in specific contexts (Morozov, 2011, p.248). Hence, for instrumentalists, the

³ ICT encompasses a wide array of technological tools and resources utilized for communication, creation, dissemination, storage, and management of information. This category includes computers, the internet, broadcasting technologies (such as radio and television), and telecommunications (like phones and networks). Social media falls under the umbrella of ICT, representing a subset that focuses on platforms and applications designed for social interaction and user-generated content sharing. To read more about ICT and its components, including social media, refer to Pelgrum, W.J., and Law, N. (2003). *ICT in Education Around the World: Trends, Problems and Prospects*. UNESCO.

internet can be utilized both for democratic mobilization and authoritarian control, depending on the political context and governance structures in place (Castells, 2009, p.106). While this perspective has its merits and applies to certain cases, it tends to overemphasize human agency in the utilization of technology, often neglecting this agency's role in the design, structure, and creation of technological objects to meet social purposes. In other words, instrumentalists suggest that technological developments are external to human social relations, or that technical developments are not products of "historically located actors" (McCarthy, 2015, p.26).

Technological essentialism, on the other hand, suggests that technological artifacts possess inherent properties that determine their societal impacts (McCarthy, 2015, p.29). According to essentialists (Winner, 1986; Feenberg, 1999; Ellul, 1964), technology is characterized as inherently biased towards specific social and political outcomes. Langdon Winner (1980), a prominent scholar in this field, argues in his work that "artifacts have politics," meaning that technological designs embody certain values and biases that can influence societal structures and power relations (pp. 121-136). This approach is a correction to those who fail to see behind technical things to realize "the social circumstances of their development, deployment, and use" (Winner, 1980, p.122). Marshall McLuhan's works are a good reference to this approach. In his seminal work *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*, he argues that the real effect comes from the hidden ground, not from content, not from the figure, but from the medium which is hidden, and never noticed (McLuhan, 1964, P.9). For instance, technologies like surveillance systems or algorithms designed for social media platforms can embed certain ideologies or prioritize specific interests, thereby influencing social norms and behaviors (Winner, 1986, p. 11). This phenomenon contributes to Sunstein (2007) "cyber polarization," where diverse perspectives are marginalized in favor of polarized and often extreme viewpoints (p.60). Social media platforms have fostered fragmented publics to a greater extent than the networked societies described by Manuel Castells (2009). In these digital platforms, individuals engage in discourse primarily within echo chambers shaped by shared ideologies, interests, and biases. This insular engagement not only narrows their exposure to

diverse perspectives but also stifles participation in broader societal dialogues, effectively creating silos of thought.

2.2.2. Opaque Algorithms: Opinions Embedded in Math

Most people assume that search engines offer identical answers to the same queries for all users. In reality, however, algorithms employed by Google and other platforms curate results to what they determine as most relevant to each individual's context. For example, a query like "stem cells" could generate completely different outcomes for a scientist compared to an activist, and an oil company executive might encounter a very different set of results for "proof of climate change" than an environmentalist would. The core idea behind modern internet filtering is relatively straightforward: algorithms analyze a person's online behavior and preferences (i.e. likes, comments, shares, viewing habits), along with those of similar users, to predict what that person will want to see next (Pariser, 2011, p.10). These "prediction engines" create a personalized bubble of information for each user, often referred to as a "filter bubble", which in words of Eli Pariser, create "a unique universe of information for each of us ...which fundamentally alters the way we encounter ideas and information" (Pariser, 2011, p.10).

Although individuals mostly tend to follow the people or media whose views are more appealing and align with ours, and ignore the rest, this new filter system introduces unique challenges like echo chambers that compel one to forget the existence of other perspectives. According to Pariser (2011, pp.10-11), these filter bubbles a) isolate individuals by creating a personal, solitary space with no shared frame of reference, b) they are invisible; unlike traditional media outlets, which provide clear explanations for their content choices, filter bubbles do not give users a clear understanding of why certain content is shown or what assumptions are driving these recommendations, and lastly, individuals do not consciously choose to enter these bubbles. Personalized filters automatically shape a person's view of the world, making it difficult to recognize or escape from them, while reinforcing biases they may or may not even know exist. Data Scientist, Cathy O'Neil (2016), in her highly effective book,

Weapons of Math Destruction, talks about the often-destructive role that algorithms play in contemporary society. She explains how in the creation of algorithms, inevitable choices are made by “fallible human beings” about what to prioritize and what to ignore, simplifying the complexities of the world into digestible models (O’Neil, 2016, p.2; Chap. 1, p.23). These models, as Cathy O’Neil aptly puts it, are often “opinions embedded in mathematics,” (p.24). They reflect the values, assumptions, and goals of their creators, whether consciously or unconsciously, and their blind spots (what they choose not to include) can have profound implications. For example, when Google Maps directs a user, it models the world as roads and highways, ignoring buildings and landscapes. This simplification works because those elements are irrelevant to the task at hand. But what happens when these algorithms overlook an entire demography? Or when they are applied to more complex human-centered tasks, like education, policing or moderating online content? The blind spots reflect not only technical limitations but also the values and priorities of their creators. The apparent objectivity of algorithms is often misleading; beneath the surface, models are embedded with the goals and biases of those who design them, shaping outcomes based on a narrow definition of success. The algorithms frequently encode “human prejudice, misunderstanding, and bias” into software systems that wield significant influence over our daily life (O’Neil, 2016, pp. 20-26).

Furthermore, these mathematical models most of time are opaque, visible only to their creators—typically mathematicians and scientists—while their workings remain invisible to the public (O’Neil, 2016, p. 2). This lack of transparency, combined with their broad societal reach, often exacerbates inequality. The negative outcomes disproportionately affect the less privileged and marginalized, while benefiting the wealthy and powerful, reinforcing systemic imbalances (O’Neil, 2016, p. 2). For instance, YouTube’s algorithmic strategy to maximize profits revolves around enhancing user engagement through sophisticated recommendation systems. In 2012, YouTube set a goal to achieve one billion hours of daily watch time, reached by October 2016, primarily by redesigning its algorithm to prioritize content that kept users watching longer. This approach, while effective in increasing ad revenue, often favored sensational and controversial content that heightened user interaction

(Tworek, 2019). YouTube's legal team reportedly advised employees against proactively searching for problematic videos, an unwritten policy designed to protect the company from potential legal liability. As Guillaume Chaslot, a former YouTube engineer, observed, this focus on engagement without scrutinizing the nature of the content led to the proliferation of hate and radicalizing videos. This illustrates the broader ethical implications of agnotology, where platforms deliberately remain ignorant of the adverse societal impacts of their engagement-maximizing strategies to avoid legal and regulatory repercussions (Tworek, 2019). As Chaslot criticized, "optimizing solely for engagement might also optimize for hate," underscoring the profound consequences of prioritizing profit over responsible content management (Tworek, 2019).

Michael Smithson (1985), underscores the role of ignorance in diminishing accountability, arguing that as technology advances and information becomes more abundant, there is a corresponding surge in deliberate cultivation and maintenance of ignorance by certain groups to serve their interests (pp.160-163). Building on Smithson's insights, Frank Pasquale (2015) explores the dynamics of the information economy, particularly focusing on Internet and finance companies who gather extensive digital data, including intimate details about their customers' lives, leveraging them to make critical decisions and shape consumer choices (p.3). He emphasizes the asymmetry of knowledge, wherein consumers lack transparency regarding the criteria used for decision-making processes, such as credit scoring or employability evaluation by predictive analytics firms (Pasquale, 2015, pp.4-5).

Pasquale (2015) further highlights the subtle but profound influence of recommendation engines employed by platforms like Amazon and YouTube, as well as other social media platforms, which shape consumers' preferences through algorithmic suggestions (p.5). Despite appearing benign, these suggestions are underpinned by the complex economic, political, and cultural agendas, challenging to decipher. Hence, companies owning digital platforms act as intermediaries, adept at navigating shifting alliances to maximize their profits within the online ecosystem (Pasquale, 2015, 146).

Eventually, the techno-optimistic (McCarthy, 2015) approach of the 1990s has given way to a more critical view, particularly after 2016, due to a growing recognition of social media's role in spreading dis/misinformation, fracturing the public sphere through algorithmic segregation, and fostering what is perceived as debased cultural content (Farkas and Schou, 2020). In the popular imagination, social media has shifted from a symbol of liberal freedoms to a symbol of threats against democracy.

2.2.3. Post-Truth Regimes: An Erosion of Trust

The 2016 US presidential election and the Brexit campaign in the UK are prominent examples, illustrating social media's role in disseminating misinformation and fostering ignorance (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017, p.212). The events not only led to discussions about the "decline of truth in the political culture of Western liberal democracies," but also catalyzed a widespread distrust in mainstream information sources, coupled with a rejection of rational considerations in belief formation (Tallis 2016). The election of Donald Trump heightened concerns about media manipulation and public deception, particularly due to Trump's unfiltered and unrestricted use of social media platforms. Consequently, there was a surge in the proliferation of "fake news" narratives disseminated to millions across diverse social media platforms (Fitzpatrick, 2018, p.45).

The involvement of the strategic communication firm Cambridge Analytica reveals the broader implications of social media's capacity to exploit users' privacy in order to manipulate public opinion. By extracting data from over 87 million Facebook users, Cambridge Analytica applied psychometric profiling and behavior prediction models, strategically utilizing targeted ads and disinformation to shape user preferences (Grassegger & Krogerus, 2018). This case underscores how social media functions as a tool for bypassing traditional mechanisms of accountability, as seen in figures like Trump, who circumvent conventional fact-checking processes, thereby contributing to the erosion of clear distinctions between truth and falsehood (McIntyre, 2018, pp. 33-34).

Allcott and Gentzkow's (2017) research on the dissemination of fake news during the 2016 U.S. presidential election highlights the alarming disparity in the spread of false narratives. Their study revealed that pro-Trump fake stories were shared on Facebook 115 times more frequently, garnering 30 million shares, compared to 41 pro-Clinton stories shared only 7.6 million times. This imbalance suggests not only a significant volume of disinformation but also the asymmetry in how falsehoods circulate within digital environments. Soroush Vosoughi's (2018) groundbreaking study further emphasized the virality of false news, finding that misinformation spreads "significantly faster, farther, deeper, and more broadly" than truth on platforms like Twitter. Analyzing 126,000 stories tweeted by 3 million users over a decade, his team discovered that humans—not just bots—play a critical role in the rapid proliferation of false information (Vosoughi, Roy & Aral, 2018, pp.1146-1151). These findings contribute to a broader understanding of how digital ecosystems magnify the influence of false narratives.

The selection of "post-truth" as Oxford's 2016 Word of the Year underscores this shift, defining it as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping political debate or public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief". This raises significant questions about human cognition and agency: to what extent are individuals receptive to fake news, and what cognitive or social factors underpin this susceptibility? Mahmoud Fawzi and Walid Magdy's (2024) recent study sheds light on this issue, examining how misinformation affects users and identifying characteristics that make individuals more prone to consuming and disseminating false information. They draw attention to the role of "architects of false narratives," who manipulate credible sources by distorting and reinterpreting facts, leading to the creation of "pseudoknowledge" (Fawzi & Magdy, 2024, p.221:3).

One critical observation from their study is that individuals who frequently spread misinformation on platforms like X (formerly Twitter) tend to inhabit localized, insular information ecosystems. These users follow accounts closely tied to state actors or accounts with a higher likelihood of suspension due to policy violations (Fawzi & Magdy, p. 211:14). This suggests that such echo chambers not only restrict exposure

to diverse viewpoints but also reinforce users' pre-existing beliefs, intensifying their commitment to false narratives.

This phenomenon can be critically analyzed through McIntyre's (2015) concept of willful ignorance, where individuals actively avoid seeking alternative perspectives because they are deeply entrenched in their prior convictions (pp. 4-5). This cognitive refusal to engage with contradicting information is exacerbated by selective exposure and confirmation biases, which in turn fuel the persistence of misinformation in digital spaces. Castells (2009) adds a crucial layer to this analysis by arguing that reality is constructed through a reaction to external and internal events; however, the human brain processes these events through unconscious patterns, often leading to distorted interpretations of reality (p.139).

Furthermore, post-truth politicians often operate not by deliberately concealing the truth, but by disregarding it altogether. Their primary concern is not the factual accuracy of their statements, but rather persuading their audience to accept their version of reality. As such, their strategy aligns more closely with that of a "bullshitter," as articulated by Harry Frankfurt (2005), than with that of a "liar," who "deliberately promulgates a falsehood" (p.13). Frankfurt posits that the essence of bullshit is "not that it is false but that it is phony" (p.13). This approach, as philosopher Peter Stokes (2016) highlights, indicates a shift from traditional deception to a form of communication where "truth-telling no longer constraints political discourse" (para. 14).

The Channel 4 series *The Undeclared War* (2022) meticulously explores the complexities of the contemporary cyber world. In a dimly lit newsroom, two fictitious organizations emerge: "Putin for Labour" and "Take Back Control of Luton." A young journalist who is visibly troubled by the unfolding narrative confronts the seasoned editor, exclaiming, "It's all fabricated! None of it's real." The editor responds without hesitation, stating, "But it does exist. Right here, this page claims ninety-six members." As these imagined yet opposing factions begin to take shape, tensions escalate, ultimately spilling into the streets and inciting violent chaos. The editor further explains to the young journalist, "Whether it is faked is not the point. I mean

everything that is reported is fake one way or another... The point is to get the people used to the idea that everything is a lie. That there is no truth. Once they accept that, well, the biggest liar wins.”

This narrative illustrates the dynamics of a “post-truth” regime, wherein the digital age enables the exploitation of emotions and trust, often overshadowing rational discourse. As Tallis (2016) notes, this environment encourages compelling yet frequently exaggerated or biased interpretations of both current conditions and future possibilities (p.10). The culture of post-truth, characterized by a relativistic perspective, suggests that “all truths are mere opinions or expressions of ulterior private interests” (Prozorov, 2018, p.18). In this context, information, emotions, and trust are manipulated both deliberately and covertly, facilitated by advancements in computing and predictive behavior models (Grassegger & Krogerus, 2018). Science and Technology Studies (STS) has been posited as an apt framework to understand post-truth, often invoking the principle of “symmetry,” which asserts that all beliefs, true or false, are examined equally, emphasizing the agency of both humans and non-humans in shaping knowledge and artifacts (Fuller 2016; Law and Lin 2017, p.213). This perspective emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between knowledge production and social dynamics, wherein social relations are influenced by the artifacts and knowledge produced, and vice versa (Law and Lin, 2017).

While the symmetry approach is often applied to analyze social media platforms in a post-truth context, from an agnotological framework this thesis suggests a counter asymmetry approach in this study to probe into the underlying mechanisms of knowledge and ignorance and power dynamics at deeper levels, thereby questioning the very notion of post-truth as inherently democratizing where all forms of knowledge are equally treated. As noted by Sergio Sismondo (2017), detailed analyses of STS on knowledge construction reveal that various factors such as infrastructure, effort, and validation structures play essential roles. These factors are instrumental in determining whose knowledge is deemed more valid and whose voices are considered worthy of recognition.

2.3. The Myth of Internet Freedom and Free Flow of Information

The United Nations recognized internet freedom as a human right in 2011, and reaffirmed it in 2016, emphasizing the importance of preventing censorship and promoting access to information globally (HRC, 2016). The addition made in Article 9 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

Since 1980, a vigorous global civil society movement has advocated for Internet freedom, a principle essential to Internet culture (Carr, 2013, p.1). Organizations such as the Open Net Initiative and the Electronic Frontier Foundation actively monitor and report on Internet censorship, filtering, and surveillance. Internet freedom is not only a human right but also a key component of the U.S.' 21st Century Statecraft foreign policy, as articulated by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (Powers and Jablonski 2015, p31). Carr (2013) contends that Internet freedom should be viewed not merely as a promotion of human rights or the “public good,” but as an “expression of state power” (p.2). The literature on internet freedom has extensively examined the practices of censorship, surveillance, and restrictions on online access employed by authoritarian regimes (Gillespie, Boczkowski & Foot, 2014; Morozov, 2011). However, there has been less attention given to how liberal democracies navigate internet freedom. The relationship between Science and Technology Studies (STS) and political theory reveals the often-oversimplified narratives surrounding freedom in the digital context. Kelty (2014) emphasizes the need for scholars in these fields to scrutinize the assertions regarding technology's connection to freedom, particularly recognizing how the act of “designing freedom into” technology fundamentally transforms one’s understanding and enactment of freedom. As Kelty asserts, “freedom cannot be unaffected by our attempts to bring it into being, to enhance it, or to restrict it,” which underscores that freedom is not merely an abstract ideal but a material construct shaped by the technological and institutional frameworks that humans create (Kelty, 2014, p. 202). This perspective challenges the traditional view of freedom,

emphasizing the active role of diverse stakeholders in shaping technologies that reflect and sometimes distort societal values and aspirations.

The perspective is important when considering how internet freedom intersects with concepts such as individual agency, privacy, transparency, and freedom of information, all of which are essential to the legitimacy of government (Carr, 2013, p.3). The promotion of internet freedom and the free flow of information has long been advocated as a cornerstone of liberal democratic values. The International Strategy for Cyberspace (EOPUS, 2011) emphasizes the importance of an open, interoperable, secure, and stable cyberspace, aligning with U.S. commitments to cybersecurity and free trade, thereby supporting the global flow of information (EOPUS, 2011). In this context, the U.S. plays a crucial role in cyberspace through diplomacy, security, and free trade, ultimately aiming for market expansion, law enforcement, and defense under U.S. parameters (McCarthy, 2015, p.116). The promotion of the free flow of information is part of a broader liberalization strategy aimed at opening foreign markets and expanding liberal democracies (Carr, 2013; McCarthy, 2015, p.9). Furthermore, the U.S. has used the internet to advance its foreign policy interests, even manipulating the banners of social movements (Aouragh & Chakravarty, 2016; Carr, 2013).

Freedom of the internet and free flow of information often operates under Western-centric norms and values, which can homogenize and marginalize diverse cultural perspectives, and local knowledge systems (Powell, 2012; Deibert, 2013; Aouragh and Chakravarty, 2016; Zuboff, 2019). Powers and Jablonski (2015) highlight how Western technological and economic interests have shaped the governance structures and protocols of the internet, influencing what information gets prioritized and how it is accessed. Through a historical perspective, they explore the concept of “actual cyber war,” that they define as the manipulation of digital networks by dominant state actors and Western cultural and economic institutions, primarily for their own benefit. This hegemonic influence, they assert, can reinforce inequalities and “asymmetries of power” on a global scale, favoring the interests of dominant actors, either government or corporate, at the expense of local communities and alternative perspectives (Powers and Jablonski 2015; Zuboff 2019). In this context, liberal economic and capitalist

values, in foreign policy, constitute the basic condition for sovereignty. American policymakers simultaneously work to undermine the legitimacy of the right to self-determination of other states, conditioning other conceptions of sovereignty depending on the degree to which they complied with Western cultural values (Carr, 2013, p.4; McCarthy, 2015, p.76).

Moreover, as a means of producing ignorance (Proctor, 2008), the free flow of information is shaped not only by laws and rhetoric but also by the inherent *form* of the internet, alongside its physical, material norms and rules, which limit the ways technology can be utilized (McCarthy, 2015, p.67). McCarthy (2015) argues that the normative framework for internet freedom reflects the structural and institutional powers of the U.S., mirroring its cultural and economic interests (p.88). Consequently, the values embedded in the network's hardware and software architectures reveal a liberal bias, epitomized in the concept of a free flow of information (McCarthy, 2015, p.9). This suggests that technology inherently influences outcomes by determining which practices are included or excluded, thus facilitating, or hindering specific objectives aligned with its designers. For instance, structures such as “endpoint systems” facilitate unbiased communication, allowing data to flow freely across networks without discrimination (McCarthy, 2015, p.9). However, governance models established by the U.S. and its allies impose significant challenges on countries that seek to implement their own regulatory measures (McCarthy, 2015; Powers and Jablonski, 2015). These models often result in high costs for regulations that diverge from American definitions, making it difficult for nations to develop independent internet policies. As such, the implications of this framework extend beyond mere technical specifications; they shape the global landscape of internet freedom and reflect a broader agenda that prioritizes specific interests over equitable access and transparency.

Influenced by Western cultural values and concerns, technological systems carry implicit biases that lead to subtle forms of cultural discrimination. These biases play a significant role in shaping individuals as subjects. Jodi Dean (2009) characterizes this issue within the framework of “communicative capitalism,” describing it as an “economic-political formation” that worsens the decline of “symbolic efficacy”

(pp.63-64). This decline signifies a breakdown in collective meaning, a fragmentation in recognizing the “other’s symbolic weight,” amid an “overwhelming” flow of content (or the decline of a collectively shared and meaningful truth), and the proliferation of uncertainty regarding politics (Dean, 2009, p.64).

This phenomenon is particularly evident in the digital age, where the “other,” whether an individual or a collective speaking from another knowledge or praxis, is alienated from the start, often reduced to data managed and sold as a commodity through supposedly neutral technology (Fuchs, 2018). Users, stripped of their subjectivity, become mere instruments within a logic of gain and national security that underpin the most popular, and successful internet platforms (Dean 2009; McCarthy 2015; Powers and Jablonski 2015). Fuchs (2018) articulates this issue regarding Facebook, describing it as ‘the epitome of digital capitalism: It treats personal data as a commodity to sell targeted advertisement...driven by algorithms that are blind to the content of what is being advertised’ (para.14). Therefore, it is not surprising that Facebook “has tolerated highly problematic data practices. Its logic is that the more online activity, data, and meta-data is generated, the more potential profit emerges” (Fuchs, 2018, para.14).

The myth of neutral technology, of internet freedom, free flow of information, and of new technology as decentralized and democratizing tool disclose a paradoxical reality where the supposed neutrality and inclusivity masks ideological selectivity and flexibility, as it subtly guides, controls, and limits the behaviors of its users, and the information that flow in these platforms (DeNardis and Hackl, 2015; Kramer et al. 2014; Zuboff 2019). For more than a decade now, the new digital and social media spheres have been able to facilitate ambiguity, “post-truth” narratives, “fake news,” and manipulation, as seen in examples like Cambridge Analytica and misinformation about Covid 19. Anything that can be transformed into a commodity can be tolerated, offering a sense of ideological and cultural neutrality under the illusion of the free flow of information and alternative uses of the internet while hiding values and decision-making capabilities. They allow for a wide range of opinions, and user-generated content, promoting flexibility in communication. However, its design inherently limits

the creation of shared knowledge and political alignment beyond basic concepts like digital literacy, commodification, and private ownership. Fragmented information, often described as “information islands” (Berners-Lee, 2010), prevents the development of a common ethical framework.

2.4. Affective Ignorance

Although this thesis emphasizes the role of giant technology companies, algorithms as opaque systems in producing and disseminating ignorance, it is equally important to touch on the targeted audience. Based on the gloomy picture seen in prior chapters one might question why and how people became receptive to ignorance and whether they can challenge it at all. However, as discussed prior, information overload and access to it does not create a more educated society. One issue that arises repeatedly in the critique of agnotology is whether human beings lack the capacity to become aware of their ignorance or manipulation. In an interesting study, Susan J. Matt and Luke Fernandez (2021) explored how the proliferation of knowledge production opened the way to psychological crises during the 19th century. A consensus developed among the majority—from scientists to researchers, workers, and students—that the pace at which knowledge was proliferating made it impossible for humans to absorb it, given that the human mind was finite (Matt and Fernandez, 2021, p. 295). This pressure of the knowledge economy led to various psychological problems, from neurasthenia to nervousness and mental fatigue, especially among the middle class. As a cure, patients were prescribed to “know nothing,” rest, and engage in minimal activity that pressured their brains (Matt and Fernandez, 2022, pp.295–296). The view on human limitation, however, was entirely the opposite of the goals of a capitalist economy that required and demanded more productivity from its workers. This explains quite a bit about the new conception of the brain that took shape in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which claimed the infinite intellectual capacity humans possessed, resonating with the beliefs of the 21st-century post-industrial and digital society, which holds an unrealistic perception of humanity that could “know ever more, do ever more, produce ever more” (Matt & Fernandez, 2022, p.297). By the end of the 19th century, scholars

suggested that the amount of information produced surpassed human capacity to grasp it, resulting in a crisis of intellectual understanding and intelligence (Matt & Fernandez, 2022, p.297).

In a contemporary context, this crisis is compounded by the emotional dimensions of information dissemination, where critical thinking is replaced with sensationalism, often prioritized over rationality and factual accuracy (McIntyre, 2018). Sara Ahmed's (2004) concept of '*affective economy*' emphasizes how emotions circulate and contribute to the formation of social identities and power relations. Drawing on psychoanalysis and Marxian critique, Ahmed (2004) describes how emotions function as a form of capital that gains value through circulation. Emotions, much like money in Marx's M-C-M (money-commodity-money) formula, do not hold intrinsic value but accumulate significance as they move across social and psychic fields (Ahmed, 2004, p.120). She argues that "emotions work as a form of capital" and, similar to capital in circulation, emotions produce value not through static possession but through their "circulation and exchange" (Ahmed, 2004, p.120). In her work, Ahmed emphasizes how emotions do not simply reside within individual subjects but are constantly moving between bodies, objects, and spaces, accumulating value as they circulate (p.119). This circulation is a defining feature of how social media platforms operate, using emotions to drive engagement, shape user behavior and, especially, foster ignorance by prioritizing emotional impact over informational accuracy. Moreover, Ahmed's analysis of how emotions circulate between bodies sheds light on the collective nature of ignorance in Agnotology 2.0. Social media platforms foster not just individual ignorance but also collective state of emotional arousal, where entire communities become emotionally bonded by shared feelings of fear, outrage, or desire (Ahmed, 2004, p.117). This collective emotional bonding can lead to the formation of online tribes, where misinformation is not only tolerated but celebrated, as it aligns with the emotional narratives that define the group (Grant, 2020). For instance, anti-vaccine communities or climate change deniers thrive in affective economies where emotions are circulated rapidly and intensively.

This emotional bonding also has broader epistemological implications. As Ahmed argues, emotions do more than move between individuals; they also shape how individuals come to perceive the world. In the context of Agnotology 2.0, emotions become a primary filter through which information is processed. When content evokes a strong emotional response, it bypasses critical faculties, becoming accepted as “true” simply because it feels true (McIntyre, 2018, p.5). This results in an epistemological crisis where the production of ignorance is not just a byproduct of misinformation but is rooted in the emotional architecture of digital platforms themselves.

To further illustrate how affective economies produce ignorance and foster emotional solidarities, one can look at two recent examples from Israel’s ongoing war on Gaza since October 7, 2023⁴. The first example is the widely circulated and now-debunked claim that Hamas “beheaded 40 Israeli babies” (Swann, 2023). The second is the widely circulated video depicting the lifeless body of a three year old Palestinian girl named Reem in the arms of her grandfather as he calls her “my heart, my two eyes” (Middle East Monitor, 2023). These examples highlight the dual nature of how affect could circulate both as a tool for manipulation and as a means of fostering empathy and resistance across borders.

In the first example, reports that Hamas had beheaded 40 babies quickly spread across social media platforms and news outlets, particularly by Israeli military officials and even the U.S. president. During an October 11 roundtable with Jewish leaders following the start of Israel’s war on Gaza, U.S. President Joe Biden is quoted as saying, “I never really thought that I would see and have confirmed pictures of terrorists beheading children” (Swann, 2023, para. 24). Despite the lack of evidence and subsequent debunking of the claim, the emotional impact of the story lingered, reinforcing an emotional climate of fear, anger, and moral outrage. Drawing from Sara Ahmed’s (2004) theory of affective economy, one can see how emotions like horror and disgust attached to this false narrative, circulating rapidly, and “sticking” to people’s perceptions of the conflict (p.119). Even after the story was debunked, the

⁴ The context of the 7 October 2023 war is extensively addressed in Chapter three.

emotional residue it left behind continued to shape public discourse, bolstering support for Israel's military actions, while deepening the polarization between supporters of Israel and Palestine. This example further demonstrates how misinformation, when emotionally charged, can override facts, and create ignorance, in line with the principles of Agnotology 2.0.

On the other hand, the global circulation of the video of Reem, a Palestinian child killed in Gaza by Israeli bombardment and held in the arms of her grieving grandfather, represents a different dimension of affective economy. The video circulated widely on social media, accompanied by emotional reactions of grief, empathy, and outrage at the suffering of Palestinian civilians. This affective circulation moved beyond digital borders and created a global solidarity movement that transcended political and geographical divisions. Unlike the emotionally charged falsehood of the "40 beheaded babies," the emotional response to Reem's death did not produce ignorance but rather challenged dominant narratives, fostering a deeper understanding of the human cost of war.

In this case, emotions such as grief and empathy circulated globally, creating affective bonds between distant communities. The image of Reem stuck to a broader discourse of resistance and solidarity, particularly within pro-Palestinian movements that have historically been marginalized or censored by dominant narratives. Here, Ahmed's concept of the "stickiness" of emotions shows how an image laden with affective power can generate a collective response that challenges ignorance rather than deepens it. This solidarity built through emotional engagement highlights the potential for affective economies to generate resistance against the dominant forces that perpetuate Agnotology 2.0. The challenge lies however in navigating these affective economies critically, discerning between emotional manipulation and authentic emotional engagement that leads to understanding rather than ignorance.

In her seminal work *Responsibility, and Affected Ignorance* (1994), Michelle Moody-Adams emphasizes the human capacity to challenge existing social norms even in difficult circumstances. She critiques the notion that ignorance can be excused by

one's upbringing or environment, arguing instead that "every human being... has the capacity to imagine that her social world might be organized on a different principle" (Moody-Adams, 1994, p. 296). This capacity for critical reflection, as Moody-Adams suggests, makes ignorance indefensible in most cases. This is particularly true for today's interconnected and digital world, where access to information is immediate and widespread. Lee McIntyre (2015) furthers this discussion by pointing out that the problem with willful ignorance is not simply the lack of knowledge, but an active decision to remain uninformed. He states that "ignorance is the lack of true knowledge. Willful ignorance is something more. It is ignorance coupled with the decision to remain ignorant" (McIntyre, 2015, p. 4). Wieland's (2017) analysis of self-interest as a motivating factor for willful ignorance sheds light on why individuals may avoid inconvenient truths. He asserts that "the agent wants to remain ignorant because it is convenient to do so, while knowledge... is inconvenient" (Wieland, 2017, p.111). This can be seen in cases of consumer behavior, where people continue to buy products from companies complicit in unethical practices, like supporting the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Even though information about boycotted products is just "one click away," many choose not to look for it because doing so would force them to make uncomfortable changes in their consumption habits. This kind of ignorance is what Nicholas Rescher (2009) calls 'culpable ignorance,' where individuals are responsible for their own lack of knowledge because they actively avoid confronting it. As Wieland articulates, "you are ignorant not because it is excessively difficult to know better, but because you don't want to know better even though it's relatively easy to do so" (Wieland, 2017, p. 106). As McIntyre (2015) argues, when people refuse to seek out reliable information, they allow falsehoods to persist and undermine rational discourse. This kind of ignorance represents a failure of both moral and epistemic responsibility, making individuals complicit in maintaining harmful practices.

2.5. Chapter Summary

Agnotology has emerged as a significant field of inquiry, offering a critical lens through which to analyze the shifting dynamics of knowledge production in contemporary society. Rather than simply cataloging instances of ignorance, it invites one to reconsider the very fabric of epistemology itself and focus on the absences and non-knowledges that often evade scrutiny. The questions shift from "what is ignorance?" to "what does ignorance do?" This shift re-situates the perception of ignorance from being a gap in knowledge to an active effect, shaped by various forces. In an age characterized by an overwhelming influx of information, scholars in the history of science have undertaken the task of scrutinizing the validity of produced knowledge. Their findings revealed a troubling historical pattern showing how powerful actors, elite groups, states, and corporations have weaponized ignorance to advance their agendas and justify the dissemination of false information.

While this examination is invaluable, the current information and communication economy introduces a complex, multilayered hyperreality in which the distinction between truth and falsehood has become increasingly tenuous. Characterized by both speed and scale, the globalized digital landscape functions as an interconnected hub, wherein events, news, and conflicts occurring in one region can have far-reaching implications worldwide. Within this framework, digital media plays a pivotal role in facilitating these transformations, shaping the flow of information, and influencing public perception across diverse contexts. As these platforms became more popular, one finds that traditional frameworks of both media and agnotology—particularly those articulated by Herman and Chomsky (1988), and Proctor (2008)—fall short. They do not adequately address the critical roles played by platforms, their designs, algorithms, policies, and user participation in producing and maintaining ignorance. In this sense, Agnotology 2.0 is not just a theoretical expansion but a necessary tool for understanding the deeper implications of digital ignorance. It allows one to see how ignorance is no longer solely the product of intentional disinformation campaigns by powerful elites but is now embedded within the very architectures of the platforms people rely on for information. The scope of ignorance has broadened, and so too must

the theories for understanding it. The following table summarizes the key differences between traditional agnotology and Agnotology 2.0, highlighting the crucial shifts in how ignorance is manufactured in the digital era.

Table 2. Traditional Agnotology Vs. Agnotology 2.0

Aspect	Traditional Agnotology	Agnotology 2.0
Mechanisms of Control	Centralized censorship, propaganda, and misinformation controlled by governments and corporations.	Decentralized, algorithm-driven systems shaping content visibility and dissemination.
Information Gatekeepers	Elites (e.g., governments, media corporations) controlling information flow.	Tech platforms, algorithms, and users influencing what information circulates online.
Scope of Ignorance	Ignorance is manufactured and sustained by top-down structures.	Ignorance is dynamically produced through user interaction, algorithmic filtering, and platform design.
Media Structure	Traditional mass media (newspapers, TV, radio) as primary vehicles for disinformation.	Social media, big data, and personalized content curation enabling viral spread of dis/misinformation.
Role of Audiences	Passive recipients of manipulated or censored information.	Active participants in the dissemination of ignorance through likes, shares, and content creation.
Examples	Tobacco industry concealing cancer risks; climate change denial.	Misinformation during the 2016 US presidential election, COVID-19 conspiracies, Meta censorship.

Agnotology 2.0 captures how ignorance is produced in fragmented, participatory environments, where users unknowingly perpetuate disinformation, while algorithms amplify content based on engagement rather than truth. Zuboff's (2019) concept of surveillance capitalism is key here: tech platforms exploit user data to tailor content, reinforcing biases and filtering out opposing viewpoints. This creates a system where ignorance is both personalized and systemic, making it harder for users to recognize the forces shaping their knowledge.

The next chapter will apply this expanded framework of Agnotology 2.0 to a case study of Meta's content moderation practices, particularly, their censorship of pro-Palestinian content, illustrating how digital platforms selectively amplify certain voices while silencing others. This case underscores the broader conversation about how digital technologies not only commodify information but also manipulate cultural and ideological narratives, perpetuating ignorance. In this complex ecosystem, the promise of diversity and freedom of expression for all in online platforms often conceals deeper biases and regulatory mechanisms that perpetuate inequalities and distort truth by removing knowledge of the "other" through silencing their voice, committing what Spivak (1988) calls "epistemic violence."

CHAPTER III

TECHNICAL GLITCH OR SYSTEMIC SILENCING?

Removal is a blunt instrument, an all-or-nothing determination, removing that content for everyone, not just for those who were offended. And it runs counter to the principles of so many platforms: open participation, unencumbered interaction, and the protection of speech (Gillespie, 2018, p.176).

Gillespie (2018) observes that social media companies have two choices they can make when they are faced with content that might be found inappropriate for some but not all users: they can either remove it or they can hide it, and many social media platforms choose the former (p.43). The question raised here, is whose freedom of expression is protected in such a case? On what basis is content found harmful or inappropriate? What are the criteria and who decides for it to be removed, and for whose benefit? Oftentimes social media companies like Meta (and its subsidiaries Facebook and Instagram) and X (formerly Twitter) do not provide transparency in this regard. The question is either entirely ignored or answered partially with vague, complex policies, or with outright denialism or strategic ignorance (McGoey, 2012). Gillespie (2018) draws attention to the irony of this paradoxical situation. On the one hand, social media companies take pride in their platforms as tools for democratizing information and promoting freedom of expression, further empowering civil societies (Gillespie, 2018, p.93). On the other hand, they promote authoritarian practices by personal-data surveillance, spreading disinformation and controlling, removing, and censoring content, thus violating not only one of their own core principles but also digital right of users (Deibert 2019; Alimardani and Elswah 2021). In the recent decade, many of these platforms have been subjected to scrutiny due to the “negative externalities” created by their services (Deibert, 2019, p.25).

During Facebook's stock market launch in 2012, Mark Zuckerberg strategically aligned the company with pro-democracy movements, such as the 2011 Arab Spring. He portrayed the controlled media systems in countries under censorship as “intermediaries controlled by a select few,” suggesting that these would be liberated by the emancipatory features of Facebook's technology (Alimardani and Elswah, 2021). Tarek Cherkaoui, manager of the TRT World Research Centre in Istanbul has identified a significant transformation in the operational ethos of platforms like Meta. Cherkaoui marks a “benign period” from 2001 to 2015, when the potential of these social media giants was underestimated both by their creators and the broader political landscape. During this era, platforms were viewed as tools for democratization and liberation, capable of challenging the traditional media systems (Alimardani and Elswah 2021). This period of relative innocence, as Cherkaoui articulates, nurtured a belief in the emancipatory potential of social media technologies, enabling diverse voices to emerge and mobilize on a large scale across territorial boundaries against injustices and authoritarian regimes. This was exemplified by the Arab Spring.

However, Cherkaoui notes a stark shift that began in 2016, catalyzed by the US elections, as discussed in the prior chapter, and subsequent global political dynamics, leading to what he terms a “malign period.” This transition reflects a growing awareness among platform operators of the immense political power and wealth they wield, resulting in stricter content moderation practices that often serve the interest of capitalist entities and their stakeholders. The dramatic shift in Meta’s policies, especially during crises like the May 2021 events surrounding the forced eviction of Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah, exemplifies this change. Reports indicated that Facebook and Instagram systematically removed or suppressed pro-Palestinian content (7amleh, 2021), effectively creating barriers to mobilization, and diminishing the visibility of Palestinian struggles (Alimardani and Elswah 2021).

Social media platforms play a pivotal role during the times of war, conflict, and other crises as spaces for “eyewitness testimony, news and information, humanitarian efforts, collective actions, and legal accountability” (Lewis, 2023, p.2398). However, these platforms also function as modern battlefields where users contest the power of content moderation tools and governance structures. According to Gillespie (2018)

these platforms act as the “custodians of the public sphere,” where they have significant control on what content gets visibility (p.5). This control often leads to suppression of graphic, violent, or contentious content, even when such content constitutes legitimate forms of expression (Lewis, 2023, 2398).

As these platforms turn into intense sites of control and censorship, Andén-Papadopoulos (2020) draws attention to how important the content shared on social media platforms are in serving crucial primary materials for narrating the social and political realities. Beyond being a mere means of expression, these contents are also a valuable resource for groups like prosecutors, researchers, journalists, and activists who increasingly rely on it to document and provide evidence of human rights abuses and war crimes (Lewis,2023, p.2399). The growth in dependence on the digital evidence for archival purposes underscore the significant role that social media content plays in contemporary information ecosystems and justice processes (Banchik, 2021). Hence, the censorship of these content not only suggests the risk for legal action and retaliation but also affects “the (in)visibility of struggles, historical memory, and how political futures are determined” (Lewis, 2023, p. 2399; Fahoum and Dubnov, 2023). While platforms claim that content moderation is crucial for safety and harm prevention (Gorwa, 2019), frequently, these measures disproportionately affect politically sensitive content, like in the case of Sheikh Jarrah. Lewis (2023) explores how this dynamic serves as a form of necropolitical governance, where decisions about what content should be visible online reflects broader socio-political controls (p.2400). As reviewed during the first chapter by essentialists and further underscored by Zuckerman (2021), content moderation is far from neutral, it's shaped by the surrounding cultural, political, and economic contexts that further contribute to bias and can silence marginalized voices and erase important narratives. In the case of Israel-Palestine, Facebook has particularly faced scrutiny for its content moderation practices, which have been accused of “overenforcement against its stated policies, processes and human rights obligations” (Lewis, 2023; BSR, 2022). This is a part of broader discourse on digital authoritarianism and commodification of user data, platforms not only serve as surveillance tools but also as gatekeepers of permissible speech (Deibert, 2019, p.26). Lewis (2023) further reveals how platforms lack

independent/subjective power to make nuanced socio-political judgments when moderating content, considering situational context, cultural nuances, and the public's right to information while at the same time balancing potential harms. The platform's practices are linked to their interior politics but at the same time they are governed by exterior politics and non-state actors (Gorwa, 2019; Suzor, 2019). While the literature on content moderation and policy governance has concentrated on the obscurity and controversiality of platform operation, its relationship with the broader socio-political and economic forces has not been adequately explored. The increasing collaboration between corporations and governments results in "asymmetrical" exercise of power to control individuals within digital platforms. As articulated by Lewis (2023) this "platform necropolitics," underscores the disturbing trend of "digitally mediated violence" where platforms possess the authority to either sustain digital subjects or suppress dissenting contents, and voices (2400).

The following section will focus on a case study to provide a detailed analysis of the implications of content moderation and mechanism of governance. This case study examines Meta's censorship and content moderation policies during two key periods: the May 2021 conflict, when Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah area were occupied by Israeli forces, and the ongoing war in Gaza following October 7, 2023. The aim is to trace the changes or continuities in Meta's content moderation policies and the broader socio-political context in which digital platforms operate. This thesis will proceed with the case study using a qualitative approach, concluding with a comparative analysis of the findings through the lens of the agnotological framework.

3.1. Case Study: May 2021, Sheikh Jarrah Eviction and Meta Policies

Everywhere you look on the map, there is a story of dispossession. In the Naqab, Palestinian Bedouins are uprooted and replaced by pine trees. In Silwan, the Occupation forces demolish homes to fulfil a biblical fantasy. In Sheikh Jarrah, ethnic cleansing comes disguised as a 'real-estate dispute.' In Beita, settlers build illegal outposts on hilltops, and soldiers kill for them. Out of all the loot, the Land remains—indisputably—the most valuable. (El Kurd, 2022).

These are the words of Palestinian writer and activist Mohammed El-Kurd from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. Together with his twin sister Muna El-Kurd, he initiated the #SaveSheikhJarrah campaign. Despite the global attention it commanded, what happened in May 2021 was not something new. The story of Palestinian's struggle can be traced back to the 1922 British Mandate and official establishment of the settler-colonial rule of the Zionist Israeli regime. However, May 2021 marked one of the more recent fights that Palestinians were forced to face. On May 8, 2021, the tension between Israelis and Palestinians reached new heights. The Israeli forces were forcibly evicting Palestinian families from their homes in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, inspiring Palestinian protest of the injustice that was brutally cracked down on by the regime (Miladi and Miladi, 2023). The situation became even more volatile when Israeli police stormed and blockaded the Al-Aqsa Mosque, a sacred religious site, intensifying the conflict (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2021). The protests that took place during the holy month of Ramadan in 2021 are observed by some as a crucial moment that marks a fundamental shift in the history of the Palestinian struggle (Nasara, 2021).

Multiple acts of aggression targeting Palestinian Muslims and Christians occurred during Ramadan at the Al-Aqsa compound and the Holy Fire celebrations at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Initially sparking small protests, these incidents intensified and spread to other Palestinian towns, largely due to the Israeli Supreme Court's rulings on evictions in Sheikh Jarrah (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2021). The court's decision to forcibly remove nineteen Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah triggered widespread demonstrations in the West Bank and Jerusalem. According to the Palestine Return Centre (PRC), this ruling “was the catalyst that escalated the events,” leading to an eleven-day Israeli bombardment of Gaza, killing 248 Palestinians and causing extensive damage (PRC 2022).

3.1.2. Online Warfare: Censorship of Palestinian Content

Parallel to the ongoing physical war were digital conflicts in the social media sphere. This was a moment when the users were increasingly documenting and sharing content about human rights violations and the “Israeli Occupation's assault on Jerusalem, Al-Aqsa Mosque, and Gaza” (Nashif 2023) across social media platforms. Young activists harnessed platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and Meta-owned Facebook and Instagram to mobilize, launch digital campaigns, and advocate for the residents of Sheikh Jarrah (Abokhodair et al., 2024). Hashtags like #SaveSheikhJarrah and #FreePalestine went viral, and their efforts successfully amplified the neighborhood's plight, reaching a global audience and pushing the issue to the forefront of international public discourse. However, accounts and content were systematically restricted and removed without any prior warning or clear justification by platforms like Facebook and Instagram (Access Now Report, 2021). Through opaque and contentious methods, content visibility and access were reduced and constrained (7amleh Report, 2021). In contrast, a recent study looked at the role of TikTok in the Sheikh Jarrah situation by analyzing three popular hashtags: #SaveSheikhJarrah, #SavePalestine, and #FreePalestine, which together received billions of views (Abbas, et al., 2022). The study found that, unlike other platforms, TikTok—owned by the Chinese company ByteDance—enabled users to share pro-Palestinian messages more engagingly by blending political content with challenge-based formats. This raises important questions about how these companies shape public discussions and influence activism. It also suggests the need to investigate how the algorithms and content moderation policies on different platforms affect social movements and political change.

3.1.3. Platform Governance and Patterns of Digital Silencing

Gillespie (2018) argues that although content moderation is essential for all digital platforms to mitigate potential harm to users, the process remains opaque. Users are often unaware when their content is moderated or restricted, resulting in reduced visibility (p.182). Moderation practices can range from account deletions and content warnings to de-platforming, as well as more subtle methods like shadow banning,

which involves content demotion and is often difficult for users to detect (Abokhodair, 2024). During the May 2021 uprising, the Palestinian activists expressed their concerns about the censorship on social media, particularly highlighting the Facebook and Instagram platform for restricting Palestinian content (Levenson, 2021). According to the complaints received by NGO's like HRW, 7amleh, Access Now in 2021, the recurring patterns of censorship—repeated over 100 times—that emerged included six key types: 1) removal of posts, 2) suspension of accounts (meaning users will not be able to use their accounts for a certain period) or even complete deletion, 3) restrictions on engagement, 4) restrictions on followers and tagging, 5) use of features like Live, monetization, and recommendation, and 6) “shadow banning,” a decrease in visibility without notification due to content distribution or search disabling. Abokhodair et al. (2024) conducted a comprehensive study that further classified these patterns into two categories: overt and covert forms, based on the methods employed. The study conducted a survey with 230 social media activists to explore their experiences of content moderation during the 2021 Sheikh Jarrah eviction. Their findings revealed that content moderation and restrictions predominantly targeted Palestinian content with 43 percent on Instagram and 25 percent on Facebook, while 17 percent on X (formerly Twitter) and 7 percent YouTube. A common experience for activists was shadow banning, with its causes and intentions often being opaque. The most common experience among users, is a covert form of restriction that occurs without users' awareness or knowledge of the reasons for reduced content visibility. Human Rights Watch (HRW) documented over 500 instances of these digital violations against Palestinian content between May 6 and May 19, 2021. Both 7amleh (The Arab Center for the Development of social media) and HRW highlighted that Meta-owned Instagram and Facebook have been one of the most prominent platforms targeting Palestinian voices, often silencing their stories and suppressing their perspectives. Facebook was actively removing contents, blocking accounts, deleting, and restricting Palestinians and pro-Palestinian posts and comments, while also shadow banning or hiding the visibility of certain hashtags like #SaveSheikhJarrah, #FreePalestine, #alAqsa.

In May 2021, activists found posts with the hashtag #SaveSheikhJarrah disappeared from Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (now X), with no tangible reason given besides a supposed “technical glitch,” as per Instagram spokesperson (7amleh 2021; Access Now 2021; Musa 2023). The company further underscored that it was not their “intent” whatsoever to intentionally suppress “their voices or their stories.” For instance, posts from the Palestinian activist Mohammed El-Kurd (2021), who initiated the #SaveSheikhJarrah campaign, despite facing numerous obstacles, achieved a level of success in drawing global attention on Instagram. However, these posts were shadow banned, which reduced their visibility among followers in their story feeds. With more than half a million followers, El-Kurd noted that his Instagram views declined dramatically, from “250k to 90k” immediately after the uprising. On the other hand, the Al-Aqsa Mosque, one of the holiest sites for Muslims in Jerusalem, was flagged as a terrorist organization, resulting in the removal of any content associated with the hashtag #AlAqsa. Meta claimed this censorship was due to a “technical glitch,” as algorithms confused the Al-Aqsa Mosque with the U.S.-designated terrorist group Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades (Musa, 2023). However, a former Facebook insider, Ashraf Zeitoon, who served as the head of policy for the Middle East and North Africa region, revealed the intricacies of Facebook’s functions and procedures, stating that employing terrorism experts who can identify “one word of a two-word name as associated with a terrorist organization” is a “lame excuse.”

On Facebook, not only were hashtags obscured, but live video broadcasts were also halted, interactive features were disabled, and previously saved content was erased (7amleh, 2021). People felt the impact of this censorship while trying to share their lived experiences, exercise their freedom of expression, or engage in political discourse (Musa, 2023). Facebook later admitted that keywords such as “resistance” (intifada) and “martyr” (shaheed) had been mistakenly removed, promising to reassess their content evaluation process, though they did not provide concrete plans for future improvements (Lewis, 2023). In response to mounting criticism during the conflict, Facebook established a “special operations center” staffed with Hebrew and Arabic speakers to ensure policy enforcement (Musa, 2023). Despite these efforts, 7amleh (2021) documented over 500 digital rights violations targeting pro-Palestinian content,

with 50% occurring on Instagram and 35% on Facebook. Additionally, 40% of the reports received by 7amleh involved hate speech and content inciting violence against Palestinians and Arabs. Similarly, the Palestinian digital rights organization Sada Social Center (2021) recorded 770 violations, with 45% on Facebook and 13% on Instagram. Furthermore, the digital rights organization Access Now (2021) has also documented hundreds of reports about Meta's suppression of pro-Palestinian content on its platforms.

In another instance, Facebook removed a post from the verified *Al Jazeera Arabic* page, which had been reshared by an Egyptian user with over 15,000 followers (Oversight Board, 2021, para.1). The post, related to the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades—the military wing of the Palestinian group Hamas—was removed for allegedly violating Meta's Dangerous Individuals and Organizations (DIO) policy. The case was brought before Meta's Oversight Board, an independent body established by Meta to provide non-binding policy guidance and review content moderation decisions. After investigation, the board found that the post did not violate the DIO rules, as it contained no expressions of praise or support for the al-Qassam armed group. Although Facebook reversed its initial decision, it did not address questions about “why two human reviewers originally judged the content to violate this policy,” noting that moderators are not required to document their rationale for individual decisions (Oversight Board, 2021). Additionally, an investigation by *The Intercept* revealed that “al-Qassam does not appear on the DIO list” (Bridle, 2021a). When the Oversight Board inquired whether Meta had received official or unofficial requests from Israel to remove content related to the May 2021 conflict and the scale of compliance with such requests, Meta responded that it had not “received a valid legal request” but remained silent on other questions (Oversight Board, 2021, para.5). The opacity surrounding Meta's content moderation underscores the complexities and challenges of understanding these procedures.

According to 7amleh (2021) Israel's Cyber Unit—actively monitoring and controlling Palestinian activities online since 2015 (Nashif 2023)—was granted a green light by the Supreme Court in 2021 to operate secretly with social media giants in their

platform governance and procedures, where restrictions are imposed on Palestinian content (Musa 2023). This “closed-loop system” leaves Palestinians guessing about the reasons behind the disappearance of their contents. Former TikTok moderator Gadear Ayden, who was a member of the “Israel team” during the 2021 violence, revealed disproportionate content moderation and how often violent and “anti-Palestine” content were kept up on the platform. Additionally, she added that all the management teams were run by Israelis with no Arabs progressing to senior positions (Musa, 2023). Human Rights Watch (2021) accused Meta of systematically suppressing and removing content related to human rights issues in Israel and Palestine, citing flawed moderation mechanisms, lack of transparency, and potential governmental influence.

3.1.4. Navigating Grey Areas: Meta’s Content Moderation Mechanisms

Meta's content moderation policies have a troubled history, including its role in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the Cambridge Analytica scandal, and its significant contribution to inciting genocide against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar in 2018 (Alimardani & Elswah, 2021). A leaked set of content moderation guidelines, published by *The New York Times* in 2018, revealed that “Facebook's guidelines do not resemble a handbook for regulating global politics; they consist of dozens of unorganized PowerPoint presentations and Excel spreadsheets with bureaucratic titles” (Fisher, 2018). The article also exposed Facebook's reliance on Google Translate for content moderation, rather than hiring native speakers, despite online translation tools being unable to capture the nuances or context of the content. Although Meta updated its policies and took measures following scrutiny during the 2021 Palestinian uprising, including establishing a “special operations center” with Hebrew and Arabic speakers to ensure policy enforcement (Musa, 2023), significant issues with its content moderation, particularly for Arabic, remain.

An independent investigation conducted by Business for Social Responsibility (BSR) on Meta's actions during May 2021 concluded that Meta’s actions had an “adverse human rights impact on the rights of Palestinian users to freedom of expression,

freedom of assembly, political participation, and non-discrimination,” limiting Palestinians' ability to share information and experiences in real-time (BSR, 2022, p.4). The report disclosed that the violations were enacted through “overenforcement” (meaning that content was *erroneously* removed, and account faced penalties by *error*, such as false strikes that affected visibility and engagement) and “underenforcement” which means that content that broke the rules was not taken down and accounts that broke the rules did not face penalties (BSR, 2022, p.4).

While Arabic content faced higher rates of overenforcement, underenforcement was applied to hundreds of thousands of Hebrew posts that incited violence and hate speech against Palestinians. This indicates disproportionate content moderation. According to 7amleh (2021), 183,000 pieces of Hebrew content on social media contained hate speech and violence, such as “a good Arab is a dead Arab” and “Slaughter all Gazans and all Arabs everywhere,” yet these posts were not removed. BSR’s findings suggested that Meta’s “Arabic hostile speech” classifier contributed to this disparity, while the lack of a “Hebrew hostile speech” classifier resulted in “various instances of unintentional bias,” causing “different human rights impact for Palestinians and Arabic-speaking users.”

Although BSR conducted a thorough investigation of Meta’s 2021 policies and content moderation, they distinguished between intentional and unintentional bias in their findings, stating they did not find evidence of intentional bias in Meta’s actions. However, both HRW (2022) and 7amleh (2023) acknowledged the importance of BSR’s initiative but argued that they had been alerting Meta to these disproportionate and problematic content moderation practices for years. They further contended that while the bias might have begun unintentionally, after years of awareness and inaction, “the unintentional became intentional.”

3.1.5. New Governors of Online Speech

The rules governing content moderation on Meta, particularly in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, are complex and contentious. One especially opaque area

involves Meta's moderation history concerning its hate speech policy, specifically the use of the term “Zionist,” along with its policies on Dangerous Individuals and Organizations (DIO) and Violence and Incitement (BSR, 2022). Critics argue that in light of ongoing Israeli abuses and violence, these policies have been enforced in ways that further restrict legitimate political speech and stifle criticism of the State of Israel (Biddle, 2021b; York, 2021). During the 2021 conflict, HRW (2021) documented hundreds of peaceful posts that were removed under Meta's DIO policy. Human rights and digital rights organizations have consistently emphasized the impact of the DOI policy in suppressing the voices of Palestinians (HRW, 2023; 7amleh, 2023). This issue is further highlighted by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, who warned that company restrictions on activities such as threatening or endorsing terrorism, supporting, or praising leaders of dangerous organizations, and promoting terrorist acts or inciting violence, are often highly ambiguous—similar to counter-terrorism legislation. Even Meta's Oversight Board has recommended that the company revise its policies to avoid censoring legally protected speech (HRW, 2023).

Meta's classification of individuals and entities under its DOI policy predominantly relies on the U.S. designated list of “foreign terrorist organizations.” This list encompasses political groups that have armed factions including Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Although these groups are not prohibited from using social media platforms under U.S. law, Meta prohibits their presence in its platforms, going beyond replicating U.S. policies.

Although Meta refused to disclose its list of DIO, a leaked list of 4,000 individuals and groups exposed by the nonprofit American left-wing news outlet Intercept revealed that the company disproportionately targets Muslim communities in the Middle East and South Asia (Biddle, 2021a). Biddle further demonstrated that Meta holds “expansive definitions of dangerous” regarding entities and content, which significantly impacts Arab regions. The leaked document also indicates that the DIO list includes many Palestinian aid organizations and human rights organizations (HROs) (Biddle, 2021a).

Israel, besides having a strong political and military alliance with the U.S., significantly contributes to Meta's advertising revenue (Shtaya, 2022), raising the question of whether this binds Meta to comply with Israel's demands for removing content and silencing Palestinian voices.

3.2. Are People Being Lied To?

To ensure Meta's fulfilment of its human rights obligations, following the 2022 assessment of Meta's content moderation actions during the May 2021 Israel-Palestine conflict, BSR recommended that Meta reassess specific content moderation policies, implement significant measures to enhance transparency regarding its content moderation practices and policies, allocate resources for more accurate Hebrew and Arabic language content moderation, and provide clearer guidance on its legal responsibilities concerning Foreign Terrorist Organizations and State Designated Global Terrorists (BSR, 2022). In response, Meta reaffirmed its commitment to transparency and accountability in its handling of content moderation, particularly in regions such as Israel and Palestine. Meta further emphasized its collaborations with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and professionals to enhance its understanding of local viewpoints and policy enforcement. This includes addressing content in both Hebrew and Arabic. Meta highlighted that it has a "large and diverse team to review Arabic content, with native language skills and an understanding of the local cultural context across the region—including in Palestine." BSR (2022) also recommended that Meta "develop and deploy functioning machine learning classifiers in Hebrew," to which Meta (2022) stated that since May 2021, it had "launched a Hebrew 'hostile speech' classifier to help us proactively detect more violating Hebrew content."

One year has elapsed since the publication of the report and Meta's commitments. Following October 7, 2023, Israel waged a genocidal war against Gaza in response to the Palestinian resistance group Hamas operation, and Meta's disproportionately

biased content moderation policies and censorship of Palestinian and pro-Palestinian voices witnessed an unprecedented increase.

3.3. October 7, 2023, and Apocalyptic Violence in Gaza Strip

3.3.1. October 7 in Context: An Overview

The events of October 7th did not occur in a vacuum; they resulted from years of oppression, displacement, human rights violations, and assaults, particularly in Gaza. While there is a long historical background to the Question of Palestine that this account cannot fully capture due to the scope and limitations of this research, this paragraph will be a brief attempt at contextualization. By December 2008, a year into the blockade of Gaza following Israel's withdrawal in 2005 and Hamas's takeover in 2007, Israel launched its deadliest bombing campaign against the enclave, lasting 22 days and killing 1,400 Palestinians. This was followed by conflicts and uprisings in 2015, 2018, and the incidents discussed above from 2021 (Lewis, 2023; Fatafta, 2021; Miladi, 2021; Al Jazeera, 2022). On October 7, 2023, Hamas launched the Al-Aqsa Flood operation by breaching the border around the Gaza Strip on which according to Israeli sources claimed the lives of 1,200 people. In response, Israel declared war and started bombarding Gaza extensively, killing more than 35,000 people since then (Access Now, 2024; Al Jazeera, 2024). An estimated 14,000 children, accounting for 40% of the total, and an additional 20,000 people are believed to be buried under the debris.

The impact on Palestinian children is particularly severe; during the first three weeks of the war, more children were killed than in all previous global conflicts combined

since 2019. Nearly 78,000 people have sustained injuries, many of which are life-threatening. The majority of Gaza's 2.4 million residents have been forced to leave their homes, and the entire population is facing a growing scarcity of food and medical supplies, with many experiencing starvation due to Israel's strict restrictions on the amount of aid allowed into the area.

Immediately following October 7, politicians propagated a Holocaust narrative, labeling the attack as “the largest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust.” This statement quickly became a mantra in Western countries (The Economist, 2023; The Guardian, 2023). As the statistics above illustrate, the analogy made between the Holocaust and the events of October 7 is quite inappropriate given the power asymmetry, a point critiqued by many experts on the Holocaust and antisemitism in an “Open Letter on the Misuse of Holocaust Memory” (Bartov et al., 2023). The authors contend that the framing of the Holocaust by Israeli and other leaders serves to depict Israel's “collective punishment of Gaza as a battle for civilization in the face of barbarism,” thereby promoting racist narratives about Palestinians.

The letter further highlights the dangers of employing such narratives, likening them to Nazism and the Holocaust, which misrepresent the underlying causes of violence in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Gilbert Achcar (2024) suggests that despite any perceived similarities between Hamas and the Nazis, more significant parallels exist between the Nazis and Israel's far-right Zionist government. The open letter by experts on the Holocaust and antisemitism further states that:

The Nazi genocide involved a state—and its willing civil society—attacking a tiny minority, which then escalated to a continent-wide genocide. Indeed, comparisons of the crisis unfolding in Israel-Palestine to Nazism and the Holocaust—above all when they come from political leaders and others who can sway public opinion—are intellectual and moral failings (Bartov et al., 2023, para.5).

The discourse surrounding October 7, which seeks to justify Israel's genocide against Palestinians—as warned by the UN and the International Court of Justice (ICJ)—is, in itself, a case of agnotology. This discourse ignores the 75 years of Israeli occupation, oppression, and displacement, including the *Nakba*, the *Naksa*, and sixteen years of

the Gaza blockade imposed by the Zionist regime (Sayigh, 2015). Instead, it creates a false impression that the events of October 7 occurred in isolation. On October 24, UN Secretary-General António Guterres was accused by Israel of “justifying terrorism” and was demanded to resign after he stated that October 7 “did not happen in a vacuum” (Achcar, 2024). Guterres further pointed to the events of 1967, stating:

The Palestinian people have been subjected to 56 years of suffocating occupation. They have seen their land steadily devoured by settlements and plagued by violence; their economy stifled; their people displaced, and their homes demolished. Their hopes for a political solution to their plight have been vanishing.

Scholars such as Ilan Pappé (2006; 2017) and Rashid Khalidi (2020) have extensively documented the systemic oppression and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians by the settler-colonial Zionist regime, which has persisted since 1948. They contend that “the ongoing occupation and policies of dispossession are part of a larger project of ethnic cleansing.” Khalidi (2020) traces the roots of the so-called ‘conflict’ to colonial imperial policies that have historically shaped the region. He argues that the occupation and its associated policies are not merely security measures, as often portrayed, but rather are strategically designed to entrench Israeli control and undermine Palestinian self-determination.

Khalidi further argues that the “occupation is not only a violation of international law but also a systematic effort to erase Palestinian presence and claims to the land” (Khalidi, 2020). However, this perspective was rejected by Israeli officials such as Benny Gantz, a member of Israel’s post-October 7 war cabinet, who labeled Guterres a “terror apologist” and called for his resignation in response to his statements (Achcar, 2024). The denial of the realities of occupation is a recurring trait among occupying powers throughout history. Nonetheless, as Foucault (1990) aptly noted, “where there is power, there is resistance” (p.95).

For the remainder of this chapter, the focus will shift to the cyberspace wars of narrative and control, specifically examining Meta’s content moderation actions and policies following October 7, 2023. Given the magnitude of death and destruction,

tech companies should have innately understood their role and responsibility without the need for explicit warnings, argues Marwa Fatafta, the MENA Policy and Advocacy Director at Access Now (2024).

According to experts, Israel's military attack on Gaza during the initial two months of the conflict has caused more destruction than the damage seen in “Ukraine's Mariupol in 2022, Syria's Aleppo from 2012 to 2016, and even the airstrikes carried out by the Allied forces in Germany during World War II” (Fatafta, 2024). Following the Israel's bombardments in October, people started documenting Israel's atrocities and human rights violations on social media platforms. However, they were systematically censored. HRW and other NGOs like Access Now, 7amleh kept receiving reports from people that their accounts were restricted, posts shadow banned, comments limited and removed specially by Meta, and X (formerly Twitter).

3.3.2. There is a Bug in the System

Three days after the outbreak, Meta reported that it had “removed or marked as disturbing more than 795,000 pieces of content” under its violation policies. Human Rights Watch (HRW) documented over 1,050 removals and other forms of content suppression on Facebook and Instagram between October and November 2023 from 60 countries. Many of the suppressed posts were peaceful and expressed solidarity with Palestinians. In its annual report published under the hashtag #Palestine2023, 7amleh reported 4,400 digital violations against Palestinians, including restrictions, removals, account hacks, and various other forms of suppression. The findings indicated that 69% of documented violations occurred after October 7, 2023 (7amleh, 2023).

Utilizing a “Violence Indicator” and an AI-powered language model, 7amleh monitored the “spread of hate speech and violence in Hebrew against Palestinians.” They detected nearly three million instances of hateful and violent content targeting Palestinians. The patterns of silencing faced by Palestinians and pro-Palestinian

voices, as documented by 7amleh (2023), were even broader and more nuanced than those seen during the 2021 Sheikh Jarrah events, including:

1. Shadow Banning: Influencers and the global public saw a decrease in views on their stories due to their content being automatically placed to the end. This is a result of their sharing news content from other pages.
2. Default setting update: Meta changed the default settings for all users in the region, changing them from public to 'friends only'. This alteration was made in order to restrict the number of individuals who may access and provide comments on public posts.
3. Comment settings changed: only individuals who have been friends or followers of the page for a minimum of 24 hours are allowed to leave comments. Meta said that the inability to comment is a result of undisclosed activities undertaken to "protect our community."
4. The bug in the system: The issue of translating the term 'Palestinian' to 'Palestinian terrorist' was reported as a 'bug.' There was also a 'bug' that censored footage depicting Palestinian casualties in the hospital blast, citing a violation of the policy on 'nudity.' Meta claimed to have resolved the issue but did not provide any explanation for the repair.
5. Content written in Arabic is excessively regulated and wrongly flagged as a violation, whilst English content remains undisturbed.

Meta has stated that fundamental human rights principles have influenced its response measures since October 7. However, its heavy dependence on automated detection systems often overlooks the context of posts, even those that clearly denounce violence (HRW, 2024). Following the 2022 BSR assessment report, Meta claimed to have hired staff with competency in Arabic and a knowledge of local culture and its nuances (Meta, 22). They also stated that they had launched a hostile Hebrew speech classifier to better assess and moderate contents in both languages. Within the first week of war, Sada Social Center (2023) reported "over 8,000 provocative posts in Hebrew and other languages which incite violence against Palestinian" that included hate speech, and

hashtags such as #למחוקאתעזה (Erase Gaza) were active on Instagram and are not subject to censorship, despite their clear incitement to violence and the tangible impact they have on the real world (7amleh, 2023). Meta promptly deleted the Arabic hashtag #طوفان_الاقصى or Al-Aqsa Flood in the first day of the escalation, whereas the parallel Hebrew hashtag was not censored as it was deemed to be in compliance with their policy.” Further, numerous social media users reported their content were censored even if they did not support Hamas (Samaro, 2023)

The disproportionate and over enforced policy practices of Meta result in constraints that prevent the dissemination of Palestinian content. Additionally, these practices may lead to the entire suspension of users, including journalists, activists, and human rights defenders, on the platforms. This incident occurred with the Facebook account of Quds News Network (شبكة القدس الإخبارية), an autonomous news agency that has an audience of approximately 10 million followers (7amleh, 2023; HRW, 2023). On the same day, an account associated with the Israeli Foreign Ministry expressed gratitude to Meta, referencing Mark Zuckerberg’s statement from three days prior. The removal of the page was inexplicable under Meta’s Dangerous Organizations and Individuals (DOI) Policy, as the journalists managing it had already communicated with Meta’s teams and were aware of the DOI policy’s implications. Journalists and observers argued that the content on Quds News Network’s page was newsworthy, similar to that published by Al Jazeera and other Arabic outlets and believed that the network was unfairly targeted (7amleh, 2023).

One of the people who was specifically targeted was Motaz Azaiza, a Palestinian photographer who gained a following of over 15 million on Instagram for his documentation of Israeli acts of violence in Gaza (HRW, 2023). Meta suspended Azaiza’s account following his upload of a video on October 12 that showed the consequences of an Israeli airstrike in his area, specifically the Deir al-Balah refugee camp. This tragic targeting killed at least 15 of his family members, predominantly women and children. In the video, Azaiza, clearly upset, first pointed the camera at himself and then showed a distressing scene: a destroyed building, a bloodstain, and a neighbor holding the lifeless body of a child (Samaro, 2023). Further, phrases such as

“From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” that have resonated at demonstrations in support of Palestinians globally have been banned. HRW (2023) has documented numerous instances where Instagram and Facebook have consistently removed slogans such as ‘Free Palestine,’ ‘Ceasefire Now,’ and ‘Stop the Genocide,’ as well as similar comments, citing them as ‘spam’ under their Community Guidelines or Standards without considering the context of comments. On the other hand, Meta permits verified accounts affiliated with the Israeli government, including lawmakers, the Israeli army, and its spokespersons, to spread war propaganda and disinformation that justifies war crimes and crimes against humanity (Samora, 2023; Biddle, 2023). This includes attacks on medical facilities and emergency vehicles, recorded confessions from Palestinian prisoners, and frequent calls for the displacement of Palestinian residents. Rather than protecting Palestinians in Gaza, despite warnings from 36 UN human rights experts and genocide researchers regarding acts of genocide, Tamleh conducted a test that revealed Meta had approved paid advertisements explicitly advocating for a ‘holocaust for the Palestinians’ and the elimination of ‘Gazan women, children, and the elderly’ (Biddle, 2023).

3.4. White Ignorance: Russia-Ukraine War

Meta's inconsistent treatment becomes especially evident when considering the continuing Russia-Ukraine war, which began in 2014 with Russia's annexation of Crimea and escalated in February 2022 with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Meta and other platforms played a significant role in the fight by exerting their influence over information warfare (Lewis, 2023). They have exceptional decision-making power, which includes the capacity to implement policy changes, supervise content moderation, and control access to platform areas. In addition, Meta has transformed into a powerful tool of the U.S. government and military machinery by creating rules that determine what is acceptable and unacceptable free expression on its platforms, and for whom, in accordance with U.S. foreign policy objectives (Biddle, 2022a; Lewis, 2023). The Intercept (2022a) suggested that Meta had adjusted its rules to allow Ukrainians more freedom of expression, including calls for violence like “death to Russian invaders!” Meta allowing hate speech breaks its own rules on

incitement, which further reveals double standard when compared to its “inability” to control hate speech in other war zones like Palestine, Syria and other non-Western conflicts. In the context of Ukraine, Meta even removed the neo-Nazi group, the Azov Battalion, from its Dangerous Organizations and Individuals (DOI) policy to permit their praise (Fatafta, 2023). The multiple revisions of Meta's content policy in context of Russia-Ukraine war led to internal confusion, namely among moderators and platform users who witnessed Meta’s silence and inaction in preventing hate speech that escalated the violence in context of Myanmar genocide (Domino, 2020). In 2019, Rohingya refugees initiated a class-action lawsuit in California seeking 150 billion USD, claiming that Facebook's inability to monitor content and the very design of its platform played a role in the violence against their community in 2017 (Middle East Monitor, 2022). Further, Meta’s exceptional open policy for Ukrainians further led to erroneous instances on the platform, like the Ukrainian Legion's running ad (which were later taken down) aimed at recruiting foreign individuals into the Ukrainian Army, which violated international law (Mac et al. 2022).

The President of Global Affairs at Meta, Nick Clegg, following the Russia-Ukraine war provided a policy update to the staff on March 13 (Milmo 2022). In the update, he clarified that the policy exception, which permits threats of violence against the Russian military, is applicable exclusively in Ukraine. In a tweet, Clegg (Lewis, 2023) stated that Meta's regulations were implemented in response to exceptional and unparalleled circumstances, with the aim of safeguarding individuals' right to freedom of speech as a means of self-defense against a military invasion of their nation. However, Meta has never revealed the criteria for their exceptionalism, and whose conditions are valid to be called “self-defense” on invasion, nor have they provided any other country and community experiencing war and conflict this exceptional measure (Fatafta 2023; Samora 2023).

Regarding the ongoing Israeli war on Gaza, Meta claims to apply its policies equally worldwide, denying any “deliberate suppression of voices.” However, the evidence paints a different picture, suggesting an Orwellian twist on this equality: while all voices are equal, some voices seem to be more equal than others.

3.5. A Comparative Analysis

Gellipie (2018) notes that “Social media platforms are vocal about how much content they make available, but quiet about how much they remove” (p.7). This emphasizes the tension between the perceived neutrality of content-sharing platforms and their actual role in shaping the digital environment. Platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram present themselves as neutral hosts, offering vast quantities of content to create an illusion of unlimited access. Yet, they strategically manage and control what users encounter (McGoey, 2012, Noble, 2014). Through moderation, algorithmic sorting, and selective promotion of content, often prioritizing posts from their financial partners, these platforms play a significant role in curating user experiences (Noble, 2014; O’Neil, 2016; Gellipie ,2018; Couldry and Mejias, 2019). Social media plays a pivotal role not only in our everyday communication but also in the context of modern conflict and war. Meta received a flurry of attention for its role in Myanmar genocide of 2017, after the UN Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) acknowledged that social media, particularly Facebook, played a “significant” role in spreading incitement in Myanmar, describing the platform as a “useful instrument” for hate speech (Domio, 2020). However, by using the “passive voice” in describing Facebook’s actions, FFM downplayed Facebook’s direct involvement and avoided attributing legal responsibility to the platform, despite its role in content moderation (Domino, 2020).

In his seminal work, *Lawless: The Secret Rules That Govern Our Digital Lives*, Nicolas P. Suzor (2019) asserts that when users are adversely affected by a technology company, "there are few avenues of redress for people who feel that they have been treated unfairly" (p.13). For instance, in the case of Myanmar genocide Facebook was not held accountable, since the international law delineates only two forms of legal responsibility in the context of regulating incitement to genocide: one directed at states and the other at natural persons. The Genocide Convention establishes that states are obligated to prevent and punish incitement to genocide within their borders (Domino, 2020). In contrast, international criminal law is designed to prosecute individuals for

statements that constitute direct and public incitement to commit genocide. The U.S. federal law grants technology companies' immunity for their moderation choices regarding online content, shielding them from liability for users' statements (Suzor, 2019; Klonick, 2018). While the First Amendment safeguards the companies' authority to manage their users, it does not offer similar protections to users against the decisions made by these technology firms. Hence, as protected by law, these self-regulating private entities turn into the “new governors of online speech” (Klonick, 2018, p.1603). One of the biggest threats that emerges with this new system of online governance is the “loss of a fair opportunity to participate,” a situation exacerbated by the system's lack of direct accountability to its users (Klonick, 2018, p. 1603).

In academic discourse, the term ‘censorship’ is often circumvented, replaced by ostensibly neutral phrases such as ‘content moderation.’ This linguistic shift reflects the challenges inherent in substantiating claims of censorship, particularly given the opaque and inconsistent nature of the policies that underpin these practices (Gillespie, 2018). While content moderation is theoretically designed to balance competing stakeholder interests and ensure the maintenance of a ‘clean’ and orderly digital space, censorship is perceived as a more extreme measure, frequently driven by ideological or commercial imperatives (Gillespie, 2018; Tufekci, 2017). The demarcation between responsible content regulation and overt suppression remains ambiguous and highly contested, rendering the task of distinguishing between moderation and censorship a complex and contentious issue.

In the context of Palestinians' presence on social media platforms like Meta, censorship operates within a nuanced and complex framework, further obscuring the boundaries between moderation and suppression. As a contemporary gatekeeper of information, Meta not only regulates the flow of content but also shapes dominant narratives, particularly in conflict-ridden regions. During key geopolitical events, such as the May 2021 Sheikh Jarrah evictions and the October 7, 2023, war, Meta's disproportionate censorship of Palestinian voices exemplified what McGoey (2012) terms ‘strategic ignorance’—a deliberate evasion of accountability by those wielding power. Far from being the result of ‘technical glitches’ or accidental content removal, Meta's actions revealed a consistent pattern of selective enforcement,

disproportionately silencing Palestinian perspectives while permitting inflammatory content from opposing groups, even when it contravened hate speech policies (7amleh, 2023; HRW, 2023).

Meta's platform governance, policies, and heavy reliance on automated moderation not only contribute to the silencing of alternative and dissenting voices but also expose a deeper systemic bias, reflecting the broader manifestation of dominant regimes of truth. These regimes prioritize certain narratives as credible while marginalizing others as unreliable or indeterminate. The sustained suppression of Palestinian perspectives not only distorts the contours of public discourse but also reinforces entrenched power structures, perpetuating colonial oppression and social injustice (Sullivan, 2017). As McCarthy (2015) contends, the design, protocols, and infrastructure of technology inherently serve the interests of their creators. In the case of Meta—a U.S.-based company—many policies, including the Dangerous Individuals and Organizations (DIO) policy, are shaped by the U.S. government's classification of "foreign terrorist organizations." This classification increasingly targets Muslim communities and humanitarian organizations in Gaza, branding them as 'terrorist' entities (Biddle, 2021a).

For example, in May 2021, Meta removed or restricted content containing terms like *shaheed*—a widely used Arabic term for martyr—under the enforcement of its DIO policy (Fatafta, 2021). Similarly, the Al-Aqsa hashtag was systematically restricted on Facebook, an action Meta initially attributed to a 'technical glitch.' However, an investigation by Meta's Oversight Board (2021) revealed that content moderation concerning DIO policies is largely overseen by human agents, highlighting the discriminatory nature of these practices. This bias is further evidenced by Meta's strict protection of content critical of Zionism, Israel's political ideology, which the company consistently shields from scrutiny.

While Meta's Oversight Board was established as an ostensibly independent entity to address such governance issues, its efficacy remains constrained. "K" is a member of the Oversight Board who agreed to be interviewed for this study, and whose identity will be kept anonymous. According to K, although the Board is empowered to make

binding decisions on individual content cases, its broader structural recommendations—such as clarifying ambiguous policy frameworks—are often disregarded or only partially implemented. K provided a revealing example, stating: “Meta accepted our recommendation that posts linking the word *shaheed* to individuals on the designated terrorist list should not be automatically removed. This adjustment has spared literally hundreds of posts daily. However, despite this incremental progress, meaningful systemic changes continue to be elusive.” K attributes this stagnation to Meta’s prioritization of legal and financial concerns, which take precedence over addressing deeper structural issues within its content moderation practices.

Meta’s biased algorithms, discriminatory policies, and the systemic silencing of Palestinian voices are closely tied to broader geopolitical dynamics. For instance, Israel’s Cyber Unit plays a significant role in shaping war narratives by influencing Meta’s content moderation practices, revealing the deep intersection between digital technologies and political agendas (Sype, 2024, para.5). Following the events of October 7, 2023, Meta removed over 795,000 pieces of content, labeling them as dangerous or in violation of its policies. Israeli officials disclosed that Meta complied with 99% of their content removal requests, a striking figure that raises concerns about the platform’s impartiality. When questioned by Human Rights Watch (HRW) about these practices, Meta opted not to respond, a silence that Schroeter (2013) frames as a deliberate tactic used to obscure actions that might provoke backlash or accountability.

Censorship, historically a method of knowledge suppression, has often been employed by authoritarian regimes to safeguard state interests (Strossen, 2018). What stands out in this case, however, is the denial of such censorship and the opaque mechanisms that facilitate it, raising questions about the accountability and transparency of digital platforms like Meta.

Despite substantial evidence from human rights organizations and content-monitoring NGOs such as 7amleh, Access Now, and Human Rights Watch, Meta continues to attribute its censorship of Palestinian content to so-called “technical glitches” or denies any intentional wrongdoing. This deflection is emblematic of broader corporate

obfuscation tactics, where asymmetrical policy enforcement is concealed behind opaque content moderation processes. As Looking back in this thesis at the interview with Tarek Cherkaoui, media expert and director of Istanbul's TRT World Research Center and a media expert, he noted that tech companies often evade accountability by framing such incidents as technical malfunctions, thereby sidestepping direct responsibility. Ehab Khalifa, coordinator of the Technological Developments Program and interviewed for this research, further emphasized that platforms like Meta, while presenting themselves as "neutral intermediaries," are significantly shaped by "geopolitical interests," as evidenced by their selective silencing of marginalized voices.

The digital repression of pro-Palestinian content has become increasingly pronounced since 2014, with May 2021 and October 2023 serving as critical moments that highlight Meta's systemic bias in content moderation. Although Meta frames its moderation practices as neutral, they are heavily influenced by a complex intersection of legal and commercial pressures. As interviewee K observes, companies prioritize compliance with national laws, yet "not all national laws are the same." In particular, Meta's susceptibility to legal action in the U.S.—where stringent laws concerning terrorist content pose significant financial risks—leads to more aggressive enforcement of material that could be interpreted as supporting designated groups. However, this approach is unevenly applied across regions. K further notes that in jurisdictions such as the U.S. and the E.U., where the legal and financial stakes are higher, compliance tends to be more stringent. Conversely, in other regions enforcement is less consistent, shaped by varying commercial and regulatory interests.

The digital suppression of pro-Palestinian content has escalated since 2014, with the events of May 2021 and October 2023 highlighting a persistent pattern of discrimination on Meta's platform. In 2022, Business for Social Responsibility (BSR) conducted a due diligence assessment evaluating the human rights impact of Meta's content moderation policies. The assessment revealed that the platform disproportionately over-enforced its moderation on Palestinian content while failing to remove Israeli content that similarly violated its terms and policies. Following the

report, Meta announced plans to introduce a classifier for detecting Hebrew hate speech. However, by October 2023, the Sada Social Center (2023) identified over 8,000 instances of hate speech and incitement in Hebrew, pointing to the continued systemic bias in Meta's moderation practices.

This bias is embedded within the platform's structural framework, as Gillespie (2018) notes in his seminal work *Custodians of the Internet*. Gillespie argues that content moderation is the core service that social media platforms provide, whether through content removal, suspension, recommendation, or curation. These platforms operate through three key layers to determine the 'right' content, product, or suggestion, where 'right' is defined as whatever maximizes user engagement, increases ad revenue, and facilitates data collection. As Gillespie (2018) suggests, content moderation is the platform's true commodity, and thus, it should be understood and treated as such:

For more than a decade, social media platforms have presented themselves as mere conduits, obscuring and disavowing their content moderation. Their instinct has been to dodge, dissemble, or deny every time it becomes clear that they produce specific kinds of public discourse in specific ways (p.206).

While it may not be feasible to hold Meta directly accountable for the proliferation of hate speech and violent content circulating on its platform, it undeniably occupies a pivotal position in the facilitation, amplification, and exacerbation of such phenomena (Gillespie, 2020). This situation invites a reevaluation of the instrumentalist perspective that regards technology as a neutral tool. The architecture of Meta's platform appears deliberately constructed to function in this manner, with algorithms that tend to polarize public discourse and perpetuate ignorance by nurturing echo chambers (McCarthy, 2015).

Moreover, Meta frequently attributes moderation shortcomings to technical limitations, utilizing automated systems as convenient proxies that obscure the true extent of its content governance and divert scrutiny from inherent systemic biases. Numerous studies have indicated that these practices disproportionately impact marginalized communities (Gillespie, 2020; Gorwa et al., 2020; Roberts, 2019; Suzor, 2019; Banchik, 2021). This pattern is aptly encapsulated by Charles Mills' concept of

“white ignorance,” which articulates a form of epistemic injustice deeply intertwined with the historical legacy of white supremacy. For example, users in the MENA region often experience a diminished status, encountering significant limitations in their access to free speech and community support when juxtaposed with users in other geographical and linguistic contexts (Alimardani & Elswah, 2021).

Mills expands the concept of agnotology to include moral ignorance, arguing that it involves not just ignorance of facts or not knowing, but also “incorrect judgments about the rights and wrongs of moral situations themselves.” Examining Meta's policy exceptionalism during the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine mirrors white ignorance rooted in white supremacy and the imperial practices of the Western world, plus the commercially motivated tech companies. Despite social media's affordances, accessibility, and relatively low cost, these do not necessarily translate into universal freedom of speech and the unrestricted flow of information. Even within the realm of technology, freedom is constrained by territorial boundaries. As argued in the second chapter, and suggested by Lewis (2023), platforms do not operate independent of external forces, and “necropolitical governmentalities” pose threat to “freedom of opinion and expression, including the right to seek, receive and disseminate diverse sources of information’ which become especially paramount ‘in times of crises and armed conflict as a precious ‘survival right’ on which people’s lives, health, safety, security, and dignity depend.” Hence, the actions and role of social media like Meta during times of war and conflict are informed by state agendas determining which voices to be amplified, which types of content are newsworthy, and who gets to speak in the platform. The 2022 BSR report concluded that they did not find any intentional censoring or removal of Palestinian narratives and voices by Meta’s content moderation policies and platform governance, although it resulted in overenforcement for Arabic content and Palestinians. However, human rights organizations like HRW, 7amleh, and Access Now have been actively documenting Meta’s human rights violations and discriminatory policy enactment for over a decade, pushing Meta to improve its policies. Hence, as posited by HRW (2022), “even if the bias started out as unintentional, after knowing about the issues for years and not taking appropriate

action, the unintentional became intentional.” This pattern feeds into how agnotology works in digital spaces.



CONCLUSION

Just as industrialization transformed how people perceived the world, themselves, and their modes of knowledge production, so too has modern technologies. Information has become abundant, or, as *The New York Times* writer Walter Sullivan noted in 1964, “information exploded,” affecting numerous sectors with rapidly produced and easily accessible data. Nearly half a century later, it has become increasingly clear that alongside this “information explosion,” there has also been an “ignorance explosion” (Smithson, 1985, p. 153). Ignorance appears to be dominating the current era, with digital media technologies playing a central role in this phenomenon.

In the digital age, individuals are empowered to participate in the creation of both knowledge and ignorance, becoming subjects and objects of their own epistemic conditions. Under the guise of democracy and free expression, they generate forms of ignorance—such as fake news, disinformation, and misinformation—as discussed in Chapter Three. As stated throughout this research, this blurs the boundaries between informed agency and manipulation, complicating traditional notions of knowledge and authority. This study has sought to illustrate how the design and operation of digital platforms—through algorithms, bots, and automated systems—not only generate but actively facilitate the production of ignorance. By using Agnotology 2.0 as a framework, this thesis argues that these processes are deeply embedded within modern capitalism and the meta-data economy, where fragmented knowledge serves broader profit-driven systems.

Operating within the fragmented and decentralized post-truth condition, as McIntyre (2018) argues, this landscape is marked by a preference for emotional resonance over factual accuracy. In the post-truth era, truth is no longer the guiding principle; instead,

beliefs are shaped by subjective feelings, where individuals accept something as true simply because it “feels right.” This shift signals a deeper, more profound crisis, transcending traditional epistemological concerns. The growing scholarly interest in agnotology points to a larger metaphysical issue of our time—the erosion of the collective pursuit of truth. The implications are far-reaching, reflecting not only the breakdown of epistemic norms but also a disintegration of the very structures that support coherent public discourse and shared reality. While this study has attempted to outline these issues, it has not fully explored the broader metaphysical dimensions, an area that future research should delve into further.

Through the case of Meta’s moderation of pro-Palestinian content during critical periods such as the 2021 Sheikh Jarrah eviction and the October 7, 2023, war in its platforms, this study examined the digital dimension of ignorance production. Despite its flawed and discriminatory policies, along with biased algorithms, Meta’s platforms—Facebook and Instagram—continue to play a pivotal role for Palestinians living under the strict control of the Zionist regime. In these instances, with the latter event amounting to genocide, Palestinians sought to use these platforms to document human rights violations, war crimes, and Israeli military atrocities, aiming to draw global attention and demand justice. However, they were met with severe online restrictions—posts were deleted, accounts suspended, engagement curbed, and visibility diminished—often without clear or valid justification. While Meta has set up an independent oversight board to regulate its decisions, this mechanism faces limitations. As interviewee K explained, “we are not independent in the sense we can force them to open all the documents... they have to agree to provide us with information.” This reflects the platform's reluctance to fully address systemic issues, particularly in politically charged contexts like Palestine, where user content is disproportionately censored.

Despite binding obligations to restore removed posts after board intervention, such as content supporting Palestinian causes, the more important systemic and structural recommendations, like transparency in moderation policies, are often disregarded. K noted that Meta “must respond within 60 days,” but their compliance is selective. In 60% of cases, Meta has accepted these structural recommendations, but in other

instances, they claim technical or financial limitations as reasons for non-compliance. This selective responsiveness underscores the platform's entrenched commercial interests, which prioritize profit over user satisfaction and accountability.

For instance, in 2017, Facebook reported revenues exceeding USD 27 billion, positioning it among the top 100 corporations globally. In contrast, the World Bank estimated Myanmar's per capita GDP to be below USD 1,500 (Zaleznik, 2021). This indicates that the company's policy decisions were not constrained by a lack of resources. However, Facebook allocated minimal resources to content moderation in case of Myanmar that concluded with genocide. As late as April 2018, civil society organizations reported that essential moderation features, such as the ability for users to "report" harmful content in Facebook, were entirely absent. Facebook had not employed any Burmese-speaking staff to handle reports of dangerous messages. Furthermore, despite assurances to engage with local stakeholders to establish measures aimed at preventing future violence, these organizations indicated they were not consulted (Zaleznik, 2021). The overwhelming evidence implicating Meta (formerly Facebook) in the genocide in Myanmar, rooted in its "inability" or "failure" to curb hate speech, brings to light a crucial issue that this study sought to highlight: the danger inherent in treating technology as a neutral instrument, devoid of human agency. Such a viewpoint conveniently transforms the technology into a scapegoat, allowing corporations to evade accountability for their complicity in amplifying violence and perpetuating discrimination.

Building on the discussion of Meta's complicity in moderating harmful content, it becomes evident that the challenges extend beyond mere oversight. As K noted, the financial resources required to develop these technologies—including the costs of building datasets, programming, and conducting ongoing audits—are substantial. Companies often prioritize profitable markets over less lucrative ones, resulting in inadequate attention to dialects or languages spoken by smaller populations. For instance, while Arabic is spoken by millions, the dialects specific to marginalized communities receive minimal investment, leading to insufficient data for accurate content moderation. Interviewee Ehab Khalifa highlights this ongoing struggle

between ethical decision-making and corporate interests, emphasizing that platforms like Meta depend heavily on advertising revenue from corporations, many of which may have political affiliations. This financial dynamic complicates the ethical landscape of content moderation, as corporate imperatives frequently overshadow the need for equitable and responsible engagement with diverse linguistic communities. Khalifa elucidates that should Mark Zuckerberg publicly align with the Palestinian perspective, there exists a tangible risk that companies supportive of Israel may withdraw their advertising from Meta. Such a withdrawal could lead to significant financial repercussions for the platform, exemplifying how economic pressures can profoundly influence the perceived impartiality of digital platforms, particularly concerning contentious political issues like the Israel-Palestine conflict. This scenario underscores the intricate interplay between corporate interests and content moderation practices, revealing how financial imperatives may compromise the integrity of discourse on critical geopolitical matters. Furthermore, Khalifa posits that while algorithms often attract scrutiny for their inherent biases, it is essential to recognize that much of this bias is rooted in the datasets upon which they are trained. This interrelation between algorithmic functioning and the corporate environment further complicates the platform's capacity to maintain a neutral stance on divisive issues.

Disparity creates a cycle where the voices and experiences of marginalized individuals are overlooked, as the algorithms are trained on biased content that reflects dominant narratives. Consequently, the inability of platforms to adequately address the complexities of diverse languages and cultures not only perpetuates existing biases but also reinforces systemic discrimination, leaving vulnerable communities further marginalized in the digital landscape.

Human rights organizations (HRW 2021; HRW 2023; 7amleh 2021; 7amleh2023) documented the reports and demanded change in Meta's platform governance and content moderation policies. With Meta either blaming the censorships to technical flaws or using their policies as a legal shield. The findings of the case study, through document analysis, traced a systemic pattern of deliberate silencing through censorship by analyzing Meta's DIO and hate speech policies, algorithmic procedures,

and automated systems under the light of agnotology. The study revealed that Meta's inconsistencies in their responses, discrimination through disproportionate content moderation, and overenforcement of their policies on Palestinian content contributed to the systemic silencing of Palestinian voices and narratives while amplifying the mainstream narratives. By investigating the mechanisms like algorithms, automated systems, and policies utilized by Meta, this research tried to provide a case of how Agnotology 2.0 can be a useful theoretical framework for understanding and studying other cases of how digital platforms and their mechanisms are used to obscure information, avoid accountability, and silence alternative voices by marginalizing them.

The digital technology's potential to produce shared knowledge and foster political orientation—beyond basic digital literacy, commodification, and private ownership—is inherently constrained by its design. While these technologies accommodate heterogeneity through flexibility, alternative views, opinions, and social organization practices, and increases the variety of user-generated content and communicative exchange, it simultaneously limits the creation of a unified ethic. This limitation arises from the existence of multiple instrumentalized “truths” and fragmented meanings, which hinder the development of a shared ethical framework in an economy that usually remains hidden and implicit. The instrumentality of digital technology opens the door to expansive practices of agnotology (Proctor, 2008), such as the intentional production of ignorance and ambiguity, as manifested in phenomenon like “post-truth,” “fake news,” and manipulation, exemplified by the cases such as Cambridge Analytica.

Consequently, this research has underscored that no technology is politically neutral. To harness its benefit for society, technology must be understood in all its political, social, economic, cultural, and even ontological dimensions. If these technologies are central to our everyday life, then it is important to scrutinize and redefine the patterns and values embedded within them. From their coding and protocols to their most specific applications, one must be part of their constant design and expansion in each of their facets. It is imperative to be aware of the risks of using technologies designed

by third parties whose values, interests, and biases are reflected and dominate in online space. Nonetheless, there are multiple ways that these risks can be addressed.

Policy Interventions to Combat Digital Ignorance

Interviewee Tarek Cherkaoui's insights into combating misinformation, Meta's monopoly, and censorship highlight the necessity of a multifaceted approach grounded in advocacy, legal reform, and innovation. Cherkaoui advocates for the necessity of supporting a diverse range of platforms, particularly those that are non-U.S. and non-Western, such as TikTok and Telegram. This diversification is essential for expanding the avenues available for user expression and mitigating the monopolistic control wielded by companies like Meta. Khalifa suggests that while some users attempted to resist this misinformation by employing various tactics, such as using coded language (i.e. Isr@el, P*les+in1ans, t*rr0rist+s) to bypass censorship, these efforts are often met with sophisticated algorithmic responses that adapt and suppress dissenting voices. Despite Meta's efforts to censor pro-Palestinian content—manifested through the deletion of posts and the shadow banning of activist voices on Instagram and Facebook—there was a significant mobilization of global protests in support of the Palestinian cause. TikTok, a platform owned by the Chinese company ByteDance, emerged as a critical space for the dissemination and circulation of pro-Palestinian content. This underscores the importance of dismantling the monopolistic structures in the technology sector, even as it is acknowledged that all platforms have inherent shortcomings.

Klonick (2018) argues that the solution to content moderation and censorship should not primarily rely on new interpretations of the First Amendment, which grants autonomy to digital platforms. Instead, it should stem from simple changes to the architecture and governance systems established by these platforms. Achieving this requires holding existing social media companies accountable for their practices. In line with this, Cherkaoui emphasizes the importance of consistently advocating for reform and accountability.

K further highlights the power of collective action, asserting that even the “lowest forms of resistance are valid, important, and useful.” K contends that such resistance shapes corporate behavior, noting that public pushback following events like the Sheikh Jarrah protests in 2021 influenced a shift in Meta’s approach to addressing issues of racism and hate speech. K underscores that “the structures change with resistance,” illustrating the dynamic interplay between user agency and corporate accountability.

This perspective aligns with the literature emphasizing the effectiveness of public pressure and legal action in compelling corporations to modify their practices (Dealing, 2020). By leveraging legal frameworks and pursuing lawsuits against violations of user rights, stakeholders can exert pressure on these companies to adopt fairer practices. As Cherkaoui asserts, “the only language they understand is the legal,” underscoring the necessity of legal recourse in enforcing accountability.

Building coalitions and alliances with like-minded organizations is crucial to amplifying the push against misinformation and censorship. Cherkaoui emphasizes the importance of forming alliances to create a unified front, reflecting research that indicates collective action can significantly enhance advocacy efforts (Harrison, 2018). For instance, NGO’s such as Access Now, 7amleh- The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media SMEX, Digital Action, ARTICLE19, Kandoo, Fight for the Future, collectively sent letters to Meta holding them responsible for the censorship of Palestinian voices following October 7, 2023 war on Gaza, and asking for response and change in policy. Tufekci (2017) argues At times, online political engagement is dismissed as “slacktivism” or “clicktivism,” which imply that such actions are simple and demand minimal effort or dedication. However, these viewpoints overlook the fact that individuals who engage online often extend their activities beyond the digital realm, and they tend to regard the online environment as equally real and interconnected with the offline World (Tufekci, 2017, p.26).

Furthermore, promoting digital literacy and critical thinking is vital in empowering users to navigate misinformation effectively. Initiatives aimed at enhancing digital literacy equip individuals with the skills to critically assess information, a need

highlighted in studies focusing on media consumption in the digital age (Mihailidis, 2018). Engaging in global forums and discussions can also elevate these issues on a larger scale. Cherkaoui advocates for addressing misinformation and censorship “at the Congress level, EU level, BRICS level,” aligning with calls for international collaboration in tackling the challenges posed by digital misinformation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Supporting fact-checking initiatives, especially by non-government, independent organizations, further combats misinformation by providing users with accurate information and reliable sources, reinforcing the need for authentic, unbiased fact-checking as a bulwark against corporate influence (Lewandowsky et al., 2012).

Finally, persistent advocacy for policy reform is crucial in addressing the structural issues underpinning misinformation and censorship. As Cherkaoui points out, “policymakers may only take these issues seriously when they are personally affected by the destabilizing effects of fake news.” This suggests that raising awareness among policymakers is essential for creating effective regulations that protect against censorship and misinformation.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Bu çalışmada, sosyal medya ve dijital çağın bilgi üretimi, akışı ve cehaletin (agnostoloji) üretimi üzerindeki etkileri ele alınmaktadır. Bu çerçevede, Proctor'un "cehaletin altın çağı" kavramsallaştırması, tarihsel ve çağdaş bağlamlarda bilinçli olarak üretilen cehalet olgusunun önemini vurgulamaktadır. Proctor, agnotolojiyi, bilginin nasıl biçimlendiğine ve bilginin bilinçli bir biçimde nasıl uzaklaştırıldığının üretimine dair bir çerçeve olarak tanımlamaktadır. Bu cehalet üretimi, yalnızca bilgi boşluklarını oluşturmakla kalmayıp, aynı zamanda çeşitli toplumsal ve siyasal güçlerin çıkarları doğrultusunda bilgi üzerinde bilinçli bir manipülasyonu da içermektedir.

Sosyal medya platformları, özellikle Meta (Facebook ve Instagram), içerik üretimi ve paylaşımı bakımından çok boyutlu ve etkileşimli bir ortam sunar. Howard ve Parks'ın bu platformların tanımına yönelik gerçekleştirdikleri çalışmalar, sosyal medyanın yalnızca bir iletişim aracı olmaktan öte, kullanıcıların bilgi üretim süreçlerini şekillendiren ve etkileyen bir mecra olarak işlev gördüğünü ortaya koymaktadır. Bu platformlar, bireylerin seslerini duyurabildiği alanlar olmanın yanında, içeriklerin denetimi ve moderasyonu yoluyla seslerin susturulabileceği bir ortam olarak da dönüşebilir.

Bu çalışmanın bir diğer önemli boyutu, dijital çağın bilgi akışını şekillendiren algoritmaların ve içerik denetleme politikalarının etkisini inceleyen bir vaka çalışmasına odaklanmaktadır. Vaka çalışması, Meta'nın özellikle 2021 ve 2023 yıllarındaki içerik moderasyonu uygulamalarını inceleyerek, bu süreçlerin bilginin üretimi ve erişimi üzerindeki etkilerini detaylı bir şekilde ortaya koymaktadır. Özellikle, bu çalışmada, bu dönemdeki savaş ve kriz bağlamlarında platformun nasıl bilinçli bir şekilde bilgi kontrolü uyguladığı ve bunun sonucunda kullanıcıların bilgiye erişimlerinin nasıl sınırlandırıldığı ve manipüle edildiği incelenmektedir.

Meta'nın içerik moderasyon politikaları, genellikle terörizm, güvenlik tehditleri veya toplumsal düzenin korunması gerekçeleriyle uygulanırken, bu tür politikaların nasıl ve hangi bağlamlarda bilgi üretimini ve paylaşımını kısıtladığı tartışılmaktadır. Vaka çalışması, bu politikaların ve algoritmaların, özellikle savaş veya kriz anlarında, seslerin susturulması ve belirli bilgilere ulaşımın engellenmesi noktasında nasıl çalıştığını ortaya koymaktadır. Sosyal medya platformlarının bu tür uygulamaları, kullanıcılara sunulan bilgilerin çerçevesini belirler ve bilginin toplum üzerindeki etkisini, kamuoyunun bilinçlenmesini ya da farkındalığını biçimlendirir.

Bu bağlamda, çalışmanın ana amacı, dijital platformların bilgi yönetimi ve denetimindeki bu mekanizmaların, cehaletin üretimine olan katkısını ve güç ilişkileri ile epistemik politikalar arasındaki bağlantıyı analiz etmektir. Vaka çalışması, aynı zamanda bu tür politikaların ve algoritmaların, sosyal medya platformları üzerinden bilginin nasıl manipüle edildiğini ve bilinçli bir cehalet ortamının nasıl yaratıldığını anlamada önemli bir analiz sunmaktadır.

Araştırma Yaklaşımı ve Amaçları

Bu araştırma, ikincil literatür taraması, nitel durum çalışmaları ve uzman görüşmelerini birleştiren çok yönlü bir yaklaşımı benimsemektedir. Bu çeşitli yöntemlerin kullanılması, özellikle dijital yönetim ve içerik moderasyon uygulamaları bağlamında, Meta'ya ait Facebook ve Instagram gibi platformlarda agnotolojinin nasıl tezahür ettiğini kapsamlı bir şekilde incelemeye olanak tanır. Bu yöntemler aracılığıyla, bu çalışma dijital alanlarda cehaleti üreten ve sürdüren mekanizmaların evrimini araştırır ve agnotolojinin geleneksel kapsamını, "Agnoloji 2.0" olarak geliştirilen bir çerçeveye genişletir.

Tezin teorik çerçevesini oluşturan agnotoloji, cehalet çalışmaları alt dalından türetilmiştir. Agnotoloji, Robert Proctor ve Linda Schienbinger (1995, 2008), Michael Smithson (1985, 2008, 2012) ve Linsey McGoey (2012, 2020) gibi önde gelen akademisyenlerin çalışmalarında incelenen bilinçli cehalet üretimini ifade eder.

Geleneksel agnotoloji teorisine dayanarak, bu araştırma içgörülerini dijital alana genişletmiştir. Literatür taraması sırasında, mevcut çalışmalarda açıkça gözlemlenen bir boşluk, cehalet üreten çağdaş araçlar ve ortamların yeterince incelenmemiş olmasıdır. Bu durum, cehaletin üretildiği veya araçsallaştırıldığı ortam ve mekanizmalardaki değişime vurgu yaparak, geleneksel cehalet çerçevelerinin genişletilmesi gerekliliğini doğurmuştur. Bu doğrultuda, bu tez, Agnotoloji 2.0'ı "post-truth" bağlamına oturtmak için eleştirel medya çalışmaları ve bilgi ve iletişim teknolojileri (ICT) alanlarından yararlanacaktır.

Teorik tartışmaları pratik bilgilerle birleştirmek amacıyla, sosyal medya profesyonelleriyle üç yarı yapılandırılmış uzman görüşmesi gerçekleştirmiştir. Her görüşme yaklaşık 45 dakika sürmüş ve Zoom üzerinden gerçekleştirilmiş olup ayrıntılı analiz için transkripte edilmiştir. Bu yöntem, uzman görüşmelerinin, genellikle geleneksel akademik araştırmalarla ulaşılamayan özel bilgilerin toplanmasına olanak sağlaması nedeniyle seçilmiştir. Roulston'a (2010) göre, uzman görüşmeleri, "elit bilgiye" erişim sağlayarak teori ile içerik moderasyonu ve sosyal medya platformlarının yönetiminde hızla değişen uygulamalar arasındaki boşluğu doldurur.

Sosyal medya platformlarında çalışan ya da bu platformları yakından izleyen profesyonellerle yapılan görüşmelerin dahil edilmesi kararı, teorik bilgi ile pratik uzmanlık arasındaki ayrımı eleştiren Bourdieu'nün (1984) çalışmalarından esinlenmiştir. Alan uzmanlarıyla etkileşim kurarak, bu çalışma, bu ayrımı aşmayı ve genellikle platformların işleyişine dair "deneyimsel bilgiye" (Flyvbjerg, 2001) sahip olan uygulayıcılara "söz hakkı" vermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Schudson'un (2006) ileri sürdüğü argüman doğrultusunda, medya kurumlarının nasıl işlediğini anlamak için uygulayıcıların görüşlerinin akademik söyleme entegre edilmesi gereklidir, özellikle de cehaletin yeniden üretimi bağlamında.

Görüşmelerin yarı yapılandırılmış formatı, platform yönetimi ve algoritmik önyargı gibi karmaşık ve değişken fenomenleri keşfetmek, politik boyutları anlamak ve gelecekteki eylem yollarını araştırmak için özellikle faydalı olmuştur. Kvale ve Brinkmann'ın (2009) belirttiği üzere, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler derinlemesine bir keşfe olanak tanırken, ortaya çıkan temaların esnek bir şekilde takip edilmesini

sağlar. Görüşmecilerin, platformların içeriği nasıl yönettiği ve sansür ile dezenformasyonla nasıl başa çıktığı konusundaki perspektifleri, durum çalışmalarının analizi için vazgeçilmez bir tamamlayıcı olmuştur.

Durum Çalışmaları

Bu araştırma, Agnotoloji 2.0'ın uygulanabilirliğini, Mayıs 2021'de Şeyh Cerrah tahliye çatışması sırasında Meta'nın içerik moderasyon politikalarını inceleyerek değerlendirmektedir. Çalışma, Şeyh Cerrah'a yönelik moderasyon politikalarını, 7 Ekim 2023'teki Filistin direniş operasyonunu takiben süregelen İsrail-Gazze savaşıyla kıyaslamaktadır. Durum çalışmaları, platform gücünün uygulandığı belirli durumları ayrıntılı olarak incelemek ve kamusal söylemi şekillendiren kontrol mekanizmalarını ortaya koymak için seçilmiştir (Yin, 2018). Özellikle bu durumlar, Meta'nın moderasyon politikalarının dezavantajlı sesleri nasıl orantısız bir şekilde etkilediğini ve Filistin yanlısı içerikleri nasıl baskıladığını, dominant anlatıları ise nasıl güçlendirdiğini göstermektedir.

Verilerin Toplanması ve Analizi

Bu çalışmada, birincil veri olarak uzman görüşmelerinin yanı sıra ikincil veri kaynakları olarak raporlar, haberler, sosyal medya içerikleri ve akademik literatür kullanılmıştır. Meta'nın içerik moderasyon politikalarına dair kamuya açık belgeler, özellikle Meta'nın Topluluk Standartları ve Oversight Board kararları, sistematik bir incelemeye tabi tutulmuştur. Bu belgeler, platformların cehalet üretimi ve bilgi kontrolündeki rolünü anlamak için hayati bir bilgi sağlamaktadır.

Ayrıca, Tamleh – The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media tarafından yayınlanan yıllık raporlar, platformların Filistin içeriklerine yönelik tutumlarını değerlendirmek için temel bir kaynak olarak kullanılmıştır. Bu raporlar, moderasyon politikalarının sistematik bir şekilde Filistin yanlısı söylemi bastırdığını gösteren istatistiksel veriler ve olay analizleri sunmaktadır. Sunulan kanıtlar, Meta'nın platformlarında belirli içeriklerin görünürlüğünü azaltma ya da tamamen kaldırma uygulamalarına dair bir anlayış geliştirmeye yardımcı olmuştur.

Veri analizi süreci, tematik analiz yaklaşımına dayalıdır. Braun ve Clarke (2006) tarafından geliştirilen bu yöntem, farklı veri kaynaklarından toplanan bilgileri kategorilere ayırarak ve kodlayarak anlamlı temalar ortaya çıkarmayı sağlar. Tematik analiz, platform moderasyon politikalarının ne ölçüde kasıtlı bir cehalet üretimiyle sonuçlandığını göstermek için uygun bir yöntemdir. Özellikle, moderasyon kararlarının arkasındaki algoritmik önyargılar ve politik etkiler üzerine yoğunlaşmıştır.

Zaman ve Mekan Perspektifi

Bu çalışma, Jennifer L. Croissant'ın (2014) "zaman" ve "mekan" kavramlarını analiz etmek için geliştirdiği kroniklik, granülerlik ve ölçek teorilerini kullanmıştır. Dijital teknolojilerin hızla değişen doğası, bilgi üretimi ve yayılımında zaman ve mekânın yeniden tanımlanmasını gerektirir. Meta gibi platformlar, hem içeriğin yayılımını hızlandırmakta hem de bilgiye erişimi sınırlayarak bilinçli bir şekilde zaman-mekân sıkışıklığı yaratmaktadır. Bu durum, Agnotoloji 2.0'in temel bir özelliği olarak analiz edilmiştir.

Dijital medya platformları, kronik ve sürekli bir bilgi akışı üretirken, bu akışın granülerliği ve ölçeği, belirli anlatıların önceliklendirilmesini ve diğerlerinin marjinalleştirilmesini mümkün kılar. Croissant'ın teorisi, Meta'nın moderasyon politikalarının bu bağlamdaki etkilerini analiz etmek için bir temel oluşturmuştur. Bu bağlamda, moderasyon politikalarının, özellikle Filistin gibi çatışmalı bölgelerde, zamansal ve mekansal dinamikler üzerindeki etkileri incelenmiştir.

Araştırmanın Kısıtlamaları

Bu çalışmanın başlıca sınırlamaları, agnotolojinin hızla evrim geçiren bir alan olması ve dijital teknolojilerin sürekli değişim göstermesidir. Meta gibi şirketlerin içerik moderasyonu ve algoritmik önyargılarla ilgili şeffaflık eksikliği, dahili süreçlerin ve politikaların kapsamlı bir şekilde incelenmesini zorlaştırmıştır. Ayrıca, dijital teknolojilerle ilgili verilerin doğrudan erişilebilir olmaması, araştırmayı büyük ölçüde literatüre, uzman görüşmelerine ve ikincil verilere dayalı olarak şekillendirmiştir.

Bu araştırma, sosyal medya platformlarının çalışma prensiplerini anlamada teknoloji ve bilgisayar bilimleri alanındaki teknik bilgiye duyulan ihtiyacı vurgulamaktadır. Ancak, mevcut araç ve tekniklerin yetersizliği, dijital platformların iç dinamiklerinin tam anlamıyla anlaşılmasını sınırlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, çalışma, teorik bir analizle sınırlı kalmış ve kapsamlı bir olay örgüsü oluşturmayı hedeflemiştir.

BİRİNCİ BÖLÜM

Bu çalışmada, bilgi üretimi ve dağıtım süreçlerinde cehaletin oynadığı rol, agnotoloji kavramı çerçevesinde ele alınmaktadır. Cehalet, geleneksel olarak bilginin yokluğu veya bir eksiklik olarak değerlendirilirken, modern teoriler bu olguyu bilginin stratejik bir şekilde bastırılması, çarpıtılması veya kasıtlı olarak üretilmesi bağlamında yeniden yorumlamaktadır. Cehaletin bu yapısal ve kasıtlı biçimleri, ekonomik, politik ve sosyal gücü elde tutmayı amaçlayan mekanizmalar aracılığıyla ortaya çıkmakta ve toplumsal düzenin şekillenmesinde merkezi bir rol oynamaktadır.

Cehaletin felsefi kökenleri, tarih boyunca bilginin sınırlarını anlamaya yönelik çabalarla şekillenmiştir. Sokrates'in "bilmediğini bilme" paradoksu, bilginin sınırlarının farkında olmayı bilgelik olarak tanımlarken, Nicholas of Cusa'nın "öğrenilmiş cehalet" kavramı, bilginin epistemolojik sınırlarını ve insan bilgisinin doğasını derinlemesine analiz eden bir yaklaşımdır. Nicholas of Cusa, bilginin sınırlı doğasını vurgulamış ve "bilinmeyi bilmek" anlayışını, bilginin sınırlarının kabulü olarak ifade etmiştir. Ancak modern yaklaşımlar, cehaleti pasif bir eksiklikten ziyade aktif bir olgu olarak ele almakta ve onu bilgi sistemlerinin ayrılmaz bir parçası olarak değerlendirmektedir.

Robert Proctor'un agnotoloji kavramı, cehaleti üç temel biçimde sınıflandırır. Doğal cehalet, bilginin henüz keşfedilmediği durumları ifade ederken, seçici cehalet, bilimsel ve toplumsal önceliklerin belirli bilgi alanlarını ihmal ettiği durumları açıklar. Stratejik cehalet ise bilginin kasıtlı olarak bastırıldığı, manipüle edildiği veya çarpıtıldığı durumları tanımlar. Proctor'un bu sınıflandırması, cehaletin bilgi sistemleri içinde nasıl üretildiği ve korunduğunu anlamak için bir temel sunmaktadır. Özellikle,

stratejik cehalet kategorisi, ekonomik ve politik güç sahiplerinin çıkarlarını korumak için bilgiye yönelik bilinçli müdahaleleri ifade eder.

Modern çağda cehaletin dinamikleri, dijitalleşme ile birlikte daha karmaşık bir hal almıştır. Algoritmalar, sosyal medya platformları ve dijital sansür, bilginin dolaşımını kontrol altına alarak cehaleti daha görünmez ve yaygın bir olgu haline getirmiştir. Meta gibi platformların içerik moderasyonu politikaları, hem bireysel hem de toplumsal düzeyde bilgi akışını manipüle ederek cehalet üretiminde yeni mekanizmalar yaratmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışmada “Agnotoloji 2.0” adı verilen bir teorik çerçeve geliştirilerek, dijital çağda cehaletin üretim ve yayılım süreçleri incelenmektedir. Bu çerçeve, dijital teknolojilerin cehalet üretimindeki rolünü analiz etmek için bir araç sunmaktadır.

Çalışma ayrıca cehaletin epistemolojik boyutlarını ve toplumsal etkilerini ele alarak, bu olgunun bilgi üretim süreçleri üzerindeki dönüştürücü etkilerini tartışmaktadır. Özellikle beyaz cehalet, sömürgeci bilgi sistemleri ve devlet destekli amnezi gibi kavramlar, baskı mekanizmalarının cehalet üretimindeki rolünü ortaya koymaktadır. Örneğin, Tantara Katliamı gibi olayların sistematik bir şekilde bastırılması, cehaletin bir iktidar aracı olarak nasıl kullanıldığını gözler önüne sermektedir. Bu bağlamda, çalışmada cehaletin sadece bilgi eksikliği değil, aynı zamanda bilgi sistemlerinin yapılandırılmasında stratejik bir araç olduğu vurgulanmaktadır.

Doğal Bir Durum Olarak Cehalet

Cehalet kavramı üzerine yapılan analizlerde, stratejik cehalet ile seçici ve doğal cehalet arasındaki farkı ayırt etmek önemlidir. Doğal cehalet, genellikle olumsuz bir özellik olarak değerlendirilen ve terimin en yaygın anlayışlarından birini temsil eden bir durumdur. Bu bağlamda Proctor’un (2008) “doğal cehalet” kavramı, “gençliğin saflığından, yanlış eğitimin eksikliklerinden ya da bilginin henüz nüfuz etmediği bir alanın varlığından kaynaklanan bir tür eksiklik” olarak anlaşılmalıdır. Bu durum, ontolojik bir özellik taşır; insan, cehalet içinde doğar ve bu, kaçınılmaz bir haldir. Doğal cehalet, bilginin yokluğundan kaynaklanan, neredeyse bebekçe bir durum

olarak tanımlanabilir; bu boşluk, öğrenme ve gelişim yoluyla zamanla doldurulur (Proctor, 2008).

Bu bağlamda cehalet, değerli bir kaynak ya da bilimsel araştırmaların sürekli ilerlemesi için gerekli bir teşvik veya katalizör olarak görülebilir. Stuart Firestein (2012), cehaletin sorgulamayı tetikleyen bir unsur olduğunu ve öğrencilerin öğrenme ve keşif için itici bir güç olarak cehaletlerini benimsemeleri gerektiğini savunur. Firestein, doğal cehaleti, “bilimin itici gücü ve bilinmeyenin verdiği heyecan” olarak tanımlar (Firestein, 2012). Cehalet her zaman kötü bir durum olarak değerlendirilmese de, bilgi üretimi sürecinde “mücadele edilmesi ya da aşılması gereken” bir şey olarak ele alınır (Proctor, 2008).

Geleneksel olarak cehalet, masumiyetle ya da seküler bir bağlamda henüz olgunlaşmamış bilgiyle ilişkilendirilmiştir. Örneğin, Sokrates gibi filozoflar, gerçek bilgelik yolunun, kişinin kendi cehaletinin farkına varmasıyla başladığını öğretmiştir. Bu yaklaşım, aydınlanma yolunda ilk adımı işaret eder. Ancak cehalet bazen bireyleri aşırı şüpheciliğe sürüklemiş ve onları bilginin ulaşılamaz olduğuna, öğrenmenin ise nihayetinde anlamsız olduğuna inandırmıştır (DeNicola, 2017, s.4). Buna karşılık modernite, cehaleti ortadan kaldırılabilir bir durum olarak görmüş ve bu boşluğun bilgiyle doldurulması gerektiği yönünde bir aciliyet duygusu yaratmıştır. Bilim, bu boşluğu doldurmaya çalışır. Ancak Smithson (1985), bu yaklaşımın “mutlakiyetçi bir epistemoloji” ile şekillendiğini ve her konuda yalnızca tek bir doğru düşünme yolunun var olduğunu varsaydığını belirtir (s.151). Bu anlayış, ideolojiyi hatalı düşünce olarak ele alan ana akım işlevselci ve Marksist yaklaşımlarda da görülür. Bu yaklaşımlar genellikle “bilimin” doğru düşünce için bir şablon sunduğunu kabul eder (Smithson, 1985, s.151).

Ayrıca, cehaletin içerdiği olumsuzluğun bir boşluk anlamına gelmediği unutulmamalıdır; cehalet, öğrenme kapasitesini içinde barındırır. Edebiyat eleştirmeni Shoshana Felman, cehaletin bilginin karşıtı olmadığını, “bilginin yapısının ayrılmaz bir parçası olan köklü bir durum” olduğunu savunur (Felman, 1982, s.29). Doğal cehalet üzerine yapılan iddialar aynı zamanda geçici bir nitelik taşır; çünkü genellikle giderilebilir bir durumdur (DeNicola, 2017).

Bugün cehalet giderek daha fazla bir endişe kaynağı haline gelmiştir. Sıklıkla dünyanın en gelişmiş ve ayrıcalıklı topluluklarından biri olarak kabul edilen ABD'deki cehalet düzeyine bakıldığında, yalnızca coğrafya veya dünya tarihi değil, aynı zamanda iç siyasi meseleler ve dünya olayları hakkında da alarm verici bir cehalet olduğu görülmektedir (Alcoff, 2007). Bu sorun, bilgi veya bilgiye erişim eksikliğinden kaynaklanmamaktadır; zira günümüzde bilgi yalnızca bir tık uzağımızdadır. Her ne kadar bu evrensel cehalet, bilimsel girişimlerin sürekliliğini sağlasa da, mevcut cehalet kültürünü teşhis etmek için bir çerçeve sunmamaktadır. Bu kültür, giderek artan bir şekilde yeni teknolojilerin yükselişiyle beslenmekte ve büyütülmektedir.

Pasif Bir Yapı Olarak Cehalet

Cehaletin, bilgi gibi, bir politik coğrafyası vardır; bu durum şu soruları gündeme getirir: Kim bilmez? Ve neden bilmez? Cehalet nerede ortaya çıkar ve neden oradadır? Bilgi, servet veya yoksulluk gibi cehalet de bir yüze, bir eve ve bir bedele sahiptir; toplumsal şansın (veya stratejik hesapların) on binlerce rastlantısında bir yerde teşvik edilirken başka bir yerde caydırılır (Proctor, 2008, s. 6).

Pasif bir yapı, kaybolmuş bir alan ya da seçici bir tercih olarak cehalet, genellikle toplumsal veya politik avantajlar sağlayan bilgi yoksunluğunun kasıtlı ya da kasıtsız olarak dışlanmasına odaklanır. Bu kategori, toplumların ve bireylerin belirli bilgileri görmezden gelmeyi nasıl tercih ettiklerini, genellikle önemli sonuçlar doğuran ince ya da örtük yollarla ortaya koyar. Proctor (2008), “sorgulamanın her zaman seçici olduğunu” öne sürer: “Buraya bakarız, oraya değil... Cehalet dikkatsizlikten doğar ve her şeyi inceleyemediğimiz için bazı şeyler -gerçekte hemen hemen her şey- kaçınılmaz olarak dışarıda bırakılır” (Proctor, 2008, s. 7).

Greyson'a (2018) göre, bilim ve öğrenme süreçleri yol bağımlıdır ve bir yolu takip etme kararı, diğer bir çalışma alanını göz ardı etmeyi gerektirir. İnsan kapasitesi, zamanı ve kaynaklarının tüm bilim dallarında uzmanlaşmayı mümkün kılmadığı bir gerçek olsa da, tercihlerin belirlenmesinde içsel faktörler kadar dışsal faktörler de etkili olur. Bu yollar; finansman fırsatları, güç dinamikleri, piyasa trendleri, öğrenenlerin bireysel ve kolektif ilgi alanları ile toplumsal etkiler gibi çok sayıda

faktör tarafından şekillenir ve bu faktörler “bazı bilgi alanlarının diğer önceliklerin seçimi nedeniyle kaybolmasına neden olur” (Greyson, 2018, s. 413).

Bilgi üretim pratikleri, her zaman tarihsel değişimler, politik ekonomi ve kültürel olarak şekillenen epistemik tercihlerin oluşturduğu daha geniş bir matrisin içine yerleşmiştir. Bu durum, “bazı araştırma programlarının öne çıkmasını, bazılarının ise marjinalleşmesini veya unutulmasını sağlayan koşulları” yaratır (Hess, 2023, s. 168). Bu dinamik, pasif yapı olarak cehalet ile stratejik bir araç olarak cehalet arasındaki çizgiyi belirlemeyi zorlaştırır. Proctor’un (2008) işaret ettiği gibi, bu iki kategori birbirine ilişkilidir, birbirini destekler ve güçlendirir. Bir tercih yapıldığında, bu genellikle o kararı stratejik olarak teşvik eden başka bir güç tarafından yönlendirilir.

Örneğin, cehalet, sosyal medyada sistematik olarak üretilebilir. Kullanıcılar, kasıtlı olarak kendileri için hazırlanmış olan yanlış bilgileri tıklamayı, okumayı ve kabul etmeyi tercih edebilirler (Rose ve Bartoli, 2019).

Araştırmanın Seçiciliği ve Kaybolan Bilgi

David J. Hess, 2023 tarihli “*Undone Science and Social Movements*” adlı eserinde, uzmanlar tarafından savunulan değerli bilimsel araştırmaların ve alternatif yaklaşımların, finansman eksikliği veya araştırma alanlarındaki seçicilik nedeniyle genellikle tamamlanmadığını vurgular. Hess, kronik hastalıkların tedavisine yönelik çeşitli yaklaşımlar üzerindeki araştırmalar için finansman eksikliği sorununu incelediğinde, araştırma önceliklerinin yalnızca içsel dinamiklerle değil, büyük sanayi şirketleri, askeri kurumlar gibi baskın toplumsal aktörler tarafından da önemli ölçüde etkilendiğini ortaya koymuştur (Hess, 2023, s. 168).

Teknik kriterler –tutarlılık, kanıt ve metodolojik standartlara dikkat– önemli olsa da, bu kriterler her zaman adil veya eşit bir şekilde uygulanmaz ve “bir alan içinde baskın araştırma programlarını sürdürmek için kullanılabilir” (Hess, 2023, s. 168). Bu nedenle, kaybolmuş bir alan veya seçici tercih olarak sınıflandırılan cehalet, bilinmeyen bilinmeyenlerden ziyade bilinen bilinmeyenler kategorisine girer. Başka

bir deyişle, genellikle politik veya toplumsal kazanç için bir araştırma yapmama veya bilgi üretmeme yönünde bilinçli bir karar alınmıştır.

Seçici Cehalet ve Tarihi Kaybın Örnekleri

Mills'in (2007) incelediği "beyaz cehalet" kavramı, ırksal önyargıların, renkli insanlara yönelik tarihsel ve çağdaş adaletsizlikleri seçici olarak görmezden gelmeye nasıl yol açtığını ve böylece ırksal hiyerarşiler ile toplumsal eşitsizlikleri nasıl sürdürdüğünü vurgular. Benzer şekilde, Schiebinger'in (2008) çalışması, seçici tercihler nedeniyle değerli bilginin nasıl kaybolabileceğini abortifacientler (düşük yapıcılar) örneği üzerinden inceler. Schiebinger, "abortifacientler... Yeni Dünya'dan Avrupa'ya aktarılamamış bir bilgi ve teknikler bütünü temsil eder. 18. yüzyılda görmezden gelinen bilgi, 19. yüzyıla gelindiğinde büyük ölçüde unutulmuştur" (s. 145) der.

17.yüzyılın sonları ve 18. yüzyılın başlarında, çoğunlukla beyaz erkeklerden oluşan Avrupalı doktorlar, Batı Hint Adaları'nda kullanılan abortifacientleri (örneğin, tavuskuşu çiçeği) görmezden gelmeyi seçmiştir. O dönemde kürtaj yasa dışı olmamakla birlikte çeşitli düşük yöntemleri kullanılıyordu. Ancak bu bitkisel tedavilerin bilgisi yasalarla bastırılmamış, sadece görmezden gelinmiş ve nihayetinde unutulmuştur. Örneğin, "kürtaj, kadın tıbbının büyük bir kısmı gibi, geleneksel olarak ebelerin alanına aitti. Kürtaja ilişkin pek çok bilgi, 18. yüzyılda ebelerden profesyonelleşmiş doğum uzmanlarına geçiş sırasında kaybolmuştur" (Schiebinger, 2008, s. 152). Bu çalışma, tarihsel botanik bilgiye ilişkin ihmallerin, sömürgeci ve cinsiyetçi önyargılar tarafından nasıl şekillendiğini ve değerli bilginin önemli bir kaybına yol açtığını göstermektedir. Seçici cehaletin yol açtığı bu tür kayıplar her zaman kasıtlı olmayabilir, ancak mevcut güç yapıları ve sosyo-kültürel dinamikler tarafından pekiştirilir. Böylelikle, pasif yapı olarak cehalet, uzun vadeli etkileri olan bilgi kayıplarına yol açabilir (Schiebinger, 2008).

Cehaletin Bilinçli İnşası

Aristoteles, *Metafizik* adlı eserinde felsefi sorgulamasına, “insan doğası gereği bilmek ister” (1998) iddiasıyla başlar. Bu iddia, insanın merakına atıfta bulunur; yani evrenin işleyişini ortaya çıkarmaya yönelik sürekli bir çabaya, evrendeki rolüne ilişkin bilgi arayışına ve ahlak ve güzellik ideallerinin peşine düşmesine. Ancak Aristoteles, yukarıdaki ifadede cehaleti seçmenin içerdiği bilişsel çelişkiye değinir; bu, doğal insan bilgi arzusuyla çelişir gibi görünür. Bu geleneksel görüşü karmaşıktırarak, kasıtlı cehalet olasılığını ortaya koyar. Fernández Pinto’nun (2015, s. 55) belirttiği gibi, cehaletin toplumsal inşasına dair çalışmalar iki temel özelliğe sahiptir. Birincisi, bu çalışmalar yapılandırmacıdır; cehaletin kasıtlı olarak nasıl üretildiğini inceler ve bu olguyu ele alma gereğini vurgular. İkincisi, cehaleti toplumsal bir perspektiften ele alır; bireysel bilgi sahibiyle değil, cehaletin üretilmesini teşvik eden toplumsal koşullarla ilgilenir (Pinto, 2015, s. 55).

Planlı cehalet, farklı alanlardan akademisyenlerce incelenmiş ve feigned ignorance (yapmacık cehalet), contrived ignorance (kurgusal cehalet), saldırgan ve savunmacı cehalet (Gold & Stel, 2022) gibi çeşitli kavramlarla adlandırılmıştır. Ancak bu literatürde kullanılan farklı ifadelerin tümünü agnotolojinin genel teorisiyle bağlayan ortak bir nokta vardır: Bunların hiçbiri cehaleti doğal bir durum olarak tanımlamaz; aksine stratejik bir yapı olarak ele alır. Cehalet bir seçim sonucu inşa edilen, üretilen veya sürdürülen bir şey olarak görülür.

Her ne kadar agnotoloji çalışmaları yalnızca “ticari güdümlü bilim”le sınırlı olmasa da, Proctor’un (1995, 2008, ss. 8-18) tütün endüstrisinin kanser araştırmalarını finanse etmesine dair araştırması, cehaletin endüstri sponsorluğundaki bilimde nasıl üretildiğini ortaya koymada önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Benzer şekilde, Oreskes ve Conway’in (2010) iklim değişikliği üzerine çalışmaları ile Michaels’ın (2008) kimya endüstrisine dair analizleri de bu mekanizmaları belgelemekte belirleyici olmuştur. Bu tez, özellikle politik ve kurumsal yapıların cehalet işlevine dayalı olarak cehalet çalışmalarından faydalanmaktadır. Bunu, aktörlerin neyi bilmediğini iddia ettiklerini, bu iddialarını desteklemek için hangi mekanizmaları kullandıklarını ve bu süreçte

kimin yararlandığını ya da zarar gördüğünü inceleyerek yapar (McGoey, 2012; Proctor, 2008; Smithson, 1985, 1989).

Ek olarak, Stanley Cohen'in (2011) "inkâr hâlleri" (*states of denial*) kavramsal analizi bu projede kritik bir öneme sahiptir. Cohen, A'nın, B'nin X kanıtına dayanarak cehaletini numara yaptığını iddia ettiği, B'nin ise bu suçlamayı stratejik taktiklerle reddettiği bir senaryoyu anlamaya yardımcı olur. Cohen (2011), "inkâr beyanları, bir şeyin olmadığını, var olmadığını, doğru olmadığını ya da bilinmediğini ifade eder" (s. 4) diye belirtir. İnkârın doğasını anlamak için Cohen, inkârın faili kimdir, inkârın düzeyi nedir (kişisel, resmî, kültürel), ve bunun 1) kelime anlamında inkâr (bu olmadı), 2) yorumsal inkâr (bu oldu, ancak görüldüğünden farklı bir anlam taşıyor), 3) ima edilen inkâr (bu oldu, ancak önemi farklı) olup olmadığını araştırır (Cohen, 2011, s. 22).

Proctor'un stratejik bir oyun olarak agnotoloji yaklaşımı, özellikle "cehalet üretimi ya da sürdürülmesi süreci – bu sürecin fail boyutlarını izlemek ve onun nasıl kurumsallaştığını incelemek" (Proctor, 2008, s. 7; Gould ve Stel, 2022) ile ilişkilidir. Stratejik cehalet kavramı, bilmemeyi çok boyutlu bir olgu olarak ortaya koyar. Bir yandan bireyler, topluluklar veya kurumlar kendi cehaletlerini korur ya da sürdürürken, diğer yandan başkalarının cehaletini üretir (Smithson, 2008, s. 211). McGoey, stratejik cehaleti bir organizasyonel kaynak olarak değerlendirir, çünkü bu durum yasal sorumluluktan kaçınma, "makul inkâr edilebilirlik" iddiasında bulunma veya organizasyon içindeki bilgi akışlarını yönetme gibi amaçlarla bilginin kasten göz ardı edilmesini içerir (McGoey, 2012, ss. 553-559).

Bu çerçevede cehaletin nasıl oluşturulduğunu, kimin bu süreçten fayda sağladığını veya mağdur olduğunu anlamak, cehalet çalışmalarını diğer teorilerden ayıran kilit soruları gündeme getirir. Bu teorik çerçeve, bilginin toplumsal yapıdaki rolüne ve iktidar ilişkilerine dair derinlemesine bir analiz sunar.

İKİNCİ BÖLÜM

Bu bölümde, cehaletin dijital çağdaki üretimi ve yayılımını Agnotoloji 2.0 çerçevesinde incelenmektedir. Yirmi birinci yüzyılda hızla ilerleyen teknolojik gelişmeler, dijitalleşme, otomasyon, büyük veri ve şeffaf olmayan algoritmalar, cehaletin devamlılığını belirgin şekilde etkilemektedir. Geleneksel agnotoloji literatürü, cehaleti genellikle bilgi manipülasyonu ile ilişkilendirse de, dijital ortamların parçalayıcı ve merkezsizleştirici doğası, cehaletin çok daha karmaşık formlarını ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu bağlamda, geleneksel medyanın merkezî yapısından farklı olarak, dijital medya ve sosyal platformlar kullanıcıların aktif katılımını sağlayarak bilginin demokratikleştiği izlenimi verse de, içerik görünürlüğü ve yayılımını şekillendiren algoritmalarla bu süreçler derin bir kontrol altına alınmaktadır.

Kitle iletişim araçlarının geleneksel eleştirileri, medya mülkiyeti, propaganda ve yanıltıcı bilginin demokratik süreçler üzerindeki etkilerine odaklanmaktadır. Örneğin, Herman ve Chomsky'nin "Propaganda Modeli," kapitalist toplumlarda medyanın elit çıkarları doğrultusunda nasıl yapılandırıldığını analiz ederken, bu model dijital çağdaki kullanıcı etkileşimlerini ve algoritmik filtreleri açıklamakta yetersiz kalmaktadır. Benzer şekilde, Adorno ve Horkheimer'ın "Kültür Endüstrisi" kavramı, medyanın toplumlara pasifleştirdiği görüşünü dile getirirken, dijital platformların kullanıcıları içerik üreticisi ve tüketicisi olarak konumlandığı bu yeni ortamda yeniden değerlendirilmesi gerekmektedir.

Louis Althusser'in ideolojik devlet aygıtları teorisi, medyanın bireyleri hâkim ideolojilere nasıl entegre ettiğini açıklarken, Stuart Hall'un "Kodlama ve Kod Açma" teorisi, medya içeriklerinin farklı sosyal bağlamlarda çok anlamlı olabileceğini savunarak daha dinamik bir okuma sürecine işaret eder. Ancak, dijital çağdaki medyanın bireylerin içerik küratörlüğünü algoritmalar aracılığıyla şekillendirdiği bir ortamda bu yaklaşımların sınırlılıkları ortaya çıkmaktadır. Cathy O'Neil'in algoritmaların toplumsal önyargıları ve eşitsizlikleri nasıl güçlendirdiğini gösteren "matematiğe gömülü görüşler" kavramı, dijital ortamların eleştirel bir analizini sunmaktadır.

Agnotoloji 2.0, bilginin üretimi ve cehaletin yayılımını dijital çağın çok katmanlı gerçekliği içinde ele almak üzere geliştirilmiştir. Bu çerçevede, geleneksel merkezi bilgi kontrolünden algoritmalar ve kullanıcı etkileşimleriyle şekillenen bir sistemde cehaletin dinamik olarak üretildiğini savunur. Özellikle sosyal medya algoritmalarının kullanıcıları yankı odalarına yönlendirmesi ve doğrulama yanlılığını güçlendirmesi, bireylerin kendi bilgi baloncuklarında izole olmasına yol açmaktadır. Bu süreç, bireylerin algılarını manipüle ederek hakikatin yerini kişisel inançların ve duygusal tepkilerin almasına neden olur.

Bölüm, ayrıca “post-truth” (hakikat sonrası) rejimlerinde duyguların cehalet üretimindeki rolüne odaklanır. Sara Ahmed'in geliştirdiği “duygu ekonomisi” teorisi, duyguların sosyal kimliklerin oluşumunda ve güç ilişkilerinde nasıl bir değer taşıdığını açıklayarak, dijital platformların duygusal etkiler yoluyla kullanıcı davranışlarını nasıl yönlendirdiğini ortaya koyar. Örneğin, yanlış bilgi içeren anlatılar, duygusal bağlar kurarak bilgi yerine cehaleti pekiştirebilirken, doğru bilgiyi içeren duygusal içerikler küresel dayanışma ve direniş duygularını besleyebilir. Bu bağlamda, Ahmed'in “duygusal yapışkanlık” kavramı, belirli imgelerin veya anlatıların nasıl kolektif tepkiler oluşturabileceğini göstermektedir.

Duygusal Cehalet

Bu tez, dev teknoloji şirketlerinin, opak sistemler olarak algoritmaların, cehaleti üretme ve yayma konusundaki rollerini vurgulasa da, hedef kitlenin üzerinde de durulması önemlidir. Önceki bölümlerde çizilen karamsar tablo temelinde, bireylerin neden ve nasıl cehalete açık hale geldikleri ve bunu sorgulayıp sorgulamayacakları sorulabilir. Ancak daha önce tartışıldığı gibi, bilgiye erişim ve bilgi fazlalığı daha eğitilmiş bir toplum yaratmaz. Agnotoloji eleştirilerinde sıkça dile getirilen bir mesele, insanların kendi bilgisizliklerinin/cehaletlerinin ya da manipülasyonların farkına varma kapasitesinden yoksun olup olmadığıdır. İlginç bir çalışmada, Susan J. Matt ve Luke Fernandez (2021), 19. yüzyılda bilgi üretiminin yaygınlaşmasının nasıl psikolojik krizlere yol açtığını incelemiştir. Bilginin artan hızının insan zihninin sınırlılıklarıyla uyumsuz olduğu konusunda bilim insanlarından araştırmacılara, işçilere ve öğrencilere kadar geniş bir kesim arasında bir fikir birliği gelişmiştir (Matt

ve Fernandez, 2021, s. 295). Bilgi ekonomisinin yarattığı bu baskı, özellikle orta sınıfta nevesteni, sinirlilik ve zihinsel yorgunluk gibi çeşitli psikolojik sorunlara yol açmıştır. Çözüm olarak hastalara “hiçbir şey bilmemek,” dinlenmek ve beyinlerini zorlayan faaliyetlerden uzak durmak önerilmiştir (Matt ve Fernandez, 2022, ss. 295–296). Ancak insan sınırlılıklarına dair bu görüş, kapitalist ekonominin işçilerden daha fazla üretkenlik talep eden hedefleriyle tamamen çelişmekteydi. Bu durum, 19. yüzyıl sonları ve 20. yüzyıl başlarında şekillenen yeni beyin anlayışını, özellikle de insanın sonsuz bir entelektüel kapasiteye sahip olduğu inancını açıklar (Matt ve Fernandez, 2022, s. 297). Bu inanç, 21. yüzyılın sanayi sonrası ve dijital toplumunun “daha fazla bilmek, daha fazla yapmak, daha fazla üretmek” düşüncesini yansıtmaktadır. 19. yüzyılın sonlarına gelindiğinde, üretilen bilginin insanın kavrama kapasitesini aştığını öne süren akademisyenler, entelektüel bir krizden bahsetmeye başlamışlardır (Matt ve Fernandez, 2022, s. 297).

Günümüz bağlamında bu kriz, bilgi yayılımının duygusal boyutlarıyla birleşerek eleştirel düşünmenin yerini duygu sömürüsüne bırakmasıyla daha da derinleşmiştir. Sara Ahmed’in (2004) “duygusal ekonomi” kavramı, duyguların nasıl dolaşımında bulunduğunu ve toplumsal kimlikler ile güç ilişkilerinin oluşumuna katkıda bulunduğunu vurgular. Ahmed (2004), duyguların tıpkı Marx’ın P-M-P (para-mal-para) formülündeki para gibi, içsel bir değere sahip olmadığını, ancak sosyal ve psikolojik alanlarda dolaşımıyla anlam kazandığını ifade eder (s. 120). Duyguların, bireyler arasında statik bir varlık olarak değil, bedenler, nesnelere ve mekanlar arasında sürekli hareket halinde olduğu ve bu dolaşım sırasında değer kazandığı bu analiz, sosyal medya platformlarının işleyişine dair önemli bir kavrayış sağlar. Ahmed’in teorisine göre, duyguların dolaşımı, Agnotoloji 2.0’da bireysel cehaletin ötesine geçerek toplumsal bir duygusal uyanış hali yaratır; böylece topluluklar korku, öfke veya arzuyla birleşir (Ahmed, 2004, s. 117).

Ahmed’in analizinden yola çıkarak, duyguların dolaşımıyla şekillenen bir kolektif cehalet durumu, çevrimiçi toplulukların yanlış bilgileri benimsemelerine ve yaymalarına neden olabilir. Örneğin, aşı karşıtı topluluklar veya iklim değişikliği inkarcıları, duyguların hızla ve yoğun bir şekilde dolaştığı bu ekonomilerde varlıklarını sürdürür.

Bu duygusal bağlanma, epistemolojik sonuçlar da doğurur. Agnotoloji 2.0 bağlamında duygular, bilginin işlenmesinde birincil bir filtre haline gelir. İçerik güçlü bir duygusal tepki uyandırdığında, eleştirel düşünme devre dışı kalır ve bilgi, yalnızca “doğru gibi hissettirdiği” için doğru kabul edilir (McIntyre, 2018, s. 5). Bu durum, yanlış bilginin yalnızca bir yan ürün olmadığı, aksine dijital platformların duygusal yapısına dayandığı bir epistemolojik kriz yaratır.

Son olarak, bu bölüm, algoritmaların şeffaf olmamasının toplumsal eşitsizlikleri nasıl derinleştirdiğini tartışır. Dijital platformların tasarımı ve politikaları, kullanıcıların hangi bilgiye erişeceğini ve hangi seslerin susturulacağını belirleyen bir epistemik şiddet biçimi olarak işlev görmektedir. Agnotoloji 2.0, bu tür platformların ideolojik taraflılıklarını ve bu sistemlerin kullanıcılar üzerinde yarattığı cehalet etkilerini ele alarak, dijital çağdaki bilgi-ekonomi ilişkilerini anlamak için vazgeçilmez bir araç sunar. Bu analiz, dijital platformların bilgi çeşitliliği ve ifade özgürlüğü vaadini, aslında derin bir seçicilik ve kontrol mekanizması ile nasıl gizlediğini açığa çıkarmaktadır.

ÜÇÜNCÜ BÖLÜM

Bu bölüm, sosyal medya platformlarının içerik denetimi ve sansür uygulamalarının, özellikle Filistinlilere yönelik sistematik baskı mekanizmaları olarak nasıl işlediğini derinlemesine ele almaktadır. Meta'nın içerik moderasyonu politikalarının, Mayıs 2021'deki Şeyh Cerrah tahliyeleri ve Ekim 2023 Gazze savaşı bağlamında nasıl şekillendiği ve bu politikaların insan hakları ihlalleriyle ilişkisi incelenmiştir. Bölüm, sosyal medya şirketlerinin özgür ifade hakkını kısıtlayan politikalarını, bu kısıtlamaların şeffaflık eksikliğiyle nasıl örtüldüğünü ve teknolojik cehalet kavramıyla nasıl ilişkilendirilebileceğini analiz etmektedir.

Gillespie'nin (2018) sosyal medya platformlarının içerik denetimindeki rolünü ele aldığı çalışmaları temel alınarak, platformların moderasyon uygulamalarında “stratejik cehalet” olarak adlandırılabilir bir eğilim sergilediği ortaya konmuştur. Bu stratejik cehalet, sosyal medya platformlarının kullanıcıların ifade özgürlüğüne dair iddialarını zayıflatan bir ikiyüzlülüğü yansıtmaktadır. Örneğin, Meta'nın politikaları,

Filistinlilere yönelik dijital ihlallerle karakterize edilmiştir. Mayıs 2021'de Meta'nın içerik moderasyonu, Filistin yanlısı içeriklerin kaldırılması, hesapların askıya alınması, etkileşimlerin kısıtlanması ve gölge yasaklar gibi uygulamalarla dikkat çekmiştir. Bu tür uygulamalar, Filistinli kullanıcıların seslerini bastırmış ve bu içeriklerin görünürlüğünü ciddi şekilde azaltmıştır.

Mayıs 2021 Şeyh Cerrah tahliyeleri sırasında, Meta'nın algoritmalarının Filistin yanlısı içerikleri yanlışlıkla "terörizm" ile ilişkilendirdiği iddia edilmiştir. Örneğin, "Al-Aqsa" hashtag'i, algoritmalar tarafından ABD tarafından terörist ilan edilen gruplarla bağlantılı olarak yanlış bir şekilde etiketlenmiş ve içerikler kaldırılmıştır. Şirket bu durumu "teknik bir aksaklık" olarak nitelendirmiş, ancak eleştirilenler bu açıklamanın ötesine geçerek sorunun daha yapısal olduğunu savunmuşlardır. Meta, 2021 olaylarından sonra politikalarını gözden geçireceğini belirtmiş ancak somut bir ilerleme sağlayamamıştır. Bu durum, dijital hak savunucuları tarafından eleştirilmiş ve sistematik bir önyargının göstergesi olarak değerlendirilmiştir.

Ekim 2023 Gazze savaşı sırasında Meta'nın içerik denetimi politikalarının etkisi daha da belirgin hale gelmiştir. Meta, yalnızca birkaç hafta içinde 795.000'den fazla içeriği kaldırmıştır. İnsan hakları örgütleri ve dijital hak savunucuları, Meta'nın Filistin yanlısı içerikleri orantısız bir şekilde sansürlediğini ve bu uygulamaların sistematik baskı politikalarını desteklediğini belgelemiştir. Örneğin, 7amleh'in raporlarına göre, Filistin yanlısı içeriklerin yayılmasını engelleyen algoritmaların yanı sıra, Arapça yazılmış içeriklerin İbranice içeriklere kıyasla çok daha sık hedef alındığı görülmüştür.

Bölümde, Meta'nın bu politikalarının dilsel ve etnik önyargılara dayandığı vurgulanmaktadır. İşlevsel bir İbranice nefret söylemi sınıflandırıcısı bulunmamasına karşın, Arapça içerikler daha sık yanlış tanımlanmış ve kaldırılmıştır. Business for Social Responsibility'in (BSR) 2022 yılında gerçekleştirdiği bağımsız bir değerlendirme raporu, Meta'nın Arapça konuşan kullanıcıların ifade özgürlüğünü ihlal ettiğini doğrulamış, ancak şirket, bu bulgulara rağmen, içerik denetimindeki dengesizliğin yapısal nedenlerini ele almakta yetersiz kalmıştır.

Bölümde ayrıca Meta'nın içerik moderasyonu politikalarının Rusya-Ukrayna savaşı bağlamında nasıl farklılaştığı ele alınmıştır. Meta'nın Ukrayna yanlısı politikalar uygulayarak nefret söylemini esnettiği, ancak benzer bir esnekliği Filistin söz konusu olduğunda göstermediği ve bu durumun içerik denetiminde ikili standartların bir göstergesi olduğu belirtilmiştir. Örneğin, Ukrayna lehine şiddet içeren ifadelerin platformda serbestçe dolaşmasına izin verilmiş, ancak benzer bir yaklaşım Filistin yanlısı içeriklere uygulanmamıştır. Bu durum, Batı merkezli üstünlük ve “beyaz cehalet” kavramları çerçevesinde değerlendirilmiştir.

Meta'nın içerik denetimi politikalarının, teknik aksaklıklarla açıklanamayacak kadar sistematik bir yapıya sahip olduğu, bu durumun dijital alanlarda epistemik adaletsizlik ve baskıya yol açtığı savunulmaktadır bu çalışmada. Bu bağlamda Meta, bilgi akışını düzenleyen yeni bir otorite olarak, yalnızca platformundaki içerikleri kontrol etmekle kalmamakta, aynı zamanda bu içeriklerin toplumsal ve politik anlatılar üzerindeki etkisini şekillendirmektedir. Bu durum, sosyal medya platformlarının nötr araçlar olmaktan uzak olduğu ve daha büyük siyasi ve ekonomik gündemlere hizmet ettiği gerçeğini ortaya koymaktadır.

SONUÇ

Sanayileşmenin insanların dünyayı, kendilerini ve bilgi üretim biçimlerini algılayışını nasıl dönüştürdüyse, modern teknolojiler de benzer bir dönüşüm gerçekleştirmiştir. Bilgi bolluğu, ya da New York Times yazarı Walter Sullivan'ın 1964'te ifade ettiği şekliyle, “bilgi patlaması,” hızlı üretilen ve kolayca erişilebilen verilerle pek çok sektörü etkilemiştir. Ancak, yarım yüzyıl sonra, bu “bilgi patlaması” ile birlikte bir “cehalet patlaması”nın da (Smithson, 1985, s. 153) yaşandığı giderek daha belirgin hale gelmiştir. Cehalet, günümüzde dijital medya teknolojilerinin merkezi bir rol oynadığı bir çağın baskın özelliği haline gelmiştir.

Dijital çağda bireyler, hem bilginin hem de cehaletin üretimine katkıda bulunarak kendi epistemik koşullarının öznesi ve nesnesi haline gelmektedir. Demokrasi ve ifade özgürlüğü kisvesi altında, sahte haberler, dezenformasyon ve yanlış bilgi gibi cehalet

biçimlerini üretmektedirler. Bu arařtırmada tartıřıldığı üzere, bu durum bilgi edinme ve manipölasyon arasındaki sınırları bulanıklařtırarak geleneksel bilgi ve otorite kavramlarını karmařıklařtırmaktadır. Çalışma, dijital platformların algoritmalar, botlar ve otomatik sistemler aracılıđıyla cehalet üretimini nasıl tasarlayıp kolaylařtırdığını göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Agnotoloji 2.0 çerçevesi kullanılarak, bu süreçlerin modern kapitalizm ve meta-veri ekonomisi içinde nasıl derinlemesine kök saldığı, parçalı bilginin daha geniş kâr odaklı sistemlere hizmet ettiđi öne sürölmüřtür.

McIntyre'in (2018) belirttiđi gibi, parçalanmış ve merkezsizleşmiş post-truth (hakikat sonrası) kořullar altında, duygusal etkiler, olgusal dođruluđun önüne geçmektedir. Bu dönemde, hakikat artık yol gösterici bir ilke olmaktan çıkmış, yerine “dođruymuş gibi hissettiren” subjektif duygularla řekillenen inançlar geçmiştir. Bu deđişim, geleneksel epistemolojik kaygıların ötesine geçen daha derin bir krizi iřaret etmektedir. Agnotolojiye olan artan akademik ilgi, günümüzün kolektif hakikat arayışının çöküşünü yansıtan daha büyük bir metafiziksel soruna iřaret etmektedir. Bu durumun etkileri, yalnızca epistemik normların bozulmasıyla sınırlı kalmayıp, kamuoyu söylemini ve ortak gerçekliđi destekleyen yapıların çözölmesini de kapsamaktadır. Bu çalışma, bu sorunları ana hatlarıyla belirtmeye çalışsa da, konunun daha geniş metafiziksel boyutlarını tam anlamıyla incelememiřtir; bu alanın gelecekteki arařtırmalarda daha derinlemesine ele alınması gerekmektedir.

Meta'nın, özellikle 2021'deki řeyh Cerrah tahliyeleri ve 7 Ekim 2023'teki savař sırasında Filistin yanlısı içerikleri denetlemesi örneğinde olduđu gibi, dijital cehalet üretimi incelenmiştir. Kusurlu ve ayrımcı politikalarına rađmen, Meta'nın platformları—Facebook ve Instagram—Filistinliler için, Siyonist rejimin sıkı kontrolü altında, insan hakları ihlalleri, savař suçları ve İsrail askerî vahřetlerini belgeleyip küresel dikkat çekme çabalarında önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Ancak bu çabalar, sıkça silinen gönderiler, askıya alınan hesaplar ve etkileşimlerin kısıtlanması gibi ciddi çevrimiçi kısıtlamalarla karşılařmıştır. Meta, kararlarını düzenlemek için bađımsız bir denetim kurulu oluřturmuş olsa da, bu mekanizma çeřitli sınırlamalarla karşı karşıyadır.

Bu durum, Meta'nın moderasyon politikalarındaki şeffaflık eksikliğini ve bu politikaların kâr odaklı önceliklere hizmet etmek amacıyla nasıl uygulandığını göstermektedir. Meta'nın cehalet üretimi ve bilgi manipülasyonundaki rolü, bu çalışmanın Agnotoloji 2.0 çerçevesi aracılığıyla ele aldığı temel bir meseleyi vurgulamaktadır: teknolojiyi tarafsız bir araç olarak görmek, bu araçların insan ajansından bağımsız olmadığını göz ardı etmektedir. Bu tür bir yaklaşım, teknolojiyi bir günah keçisine dönüştürerek, şirketlerin şiddeti artırma ve ayrımcılığı pekiştirme konusundaki sorumluluklarından kaçmalarını kolaylaştırmaktadır.

Araştırma, dijital teknolojilerin yalnızca bilgi paylaşımı ve politik yönlendirme potansiyeliyle değil, aynı zamanda bu potansiyeli sınırlandıran tasarımlarıyla da derinlemesine ilişkilendirilmesi gerektiğini savunmaktadır. Dijital okuryazarlık, medya eleştirisi ve küresel işbirliğini teşvik eden politik müdahaleler, dijital platformlarda bilgi manipülasyonu ve cehalet üretimiyle mücadelede hayati öneme sahiptir.

Çalışmada, Meta'nın içerik moderasyonu politikalarının Filistinlilerin seslerini nasıl sistematik olarak bastırdığı ve bu süreçte ekonomik, politik ve kültürel dinamiklerin nasıl bir rol oynadığı incelenmiştir. 2021'deki Şeyh Cerrah tahliyesi ve 2023'teki Gazze savaşı sırasında, Filistinli kullanıcılar insan hakları ihlallerini belgelemek ve küresel farkındalık yaratmak amacıyla Meta'nın platformlarını kullanmışlardır. Ancak bu içerikler sıklıkla silinmiş, hesaplar askıya alınmış ve içeriklerin görünürlüğü gölge yasaklarla azaltılmıştır. Bu durum, Meta'nın platformlarının belirli politik çıkarlar doğrultusunda taraflı bir şekilde işlediğini ve kullanıcıların ifade özgürlüğünü ihlal ettiğini göstermektedir.

Meta'nın içerik moderasyonu süreçleri, genellikle “teknik aksaklıklar” veya “otomatik sistem hataları” gibi gerekçelerle açıklanmış olsa da, bu durum insan hakları örgütlerinin ve bağımsız raporların sunduğu bulgularla çelişmektedir. Örneğin, Arapça içeriklerin orantısız bir şekilde hedef alınması, algoritmaların ve politikaların yapısal önyargılar taşıdığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu önyargılar, yalnızca bireysel kullanıcıların deneyimlerini değil, aynı zamanda küresel bilgi akışını da şekillendirmekte ve belirli anlatıların hâkim olmasına neden olmaktadır.

Dijital platformların tasarımından işleyişine kadar her aşamada, bu çalışmada agnotoloji kavramı temel alınarak bir analiz yapılmıştır. Agnotoloji 2.0 çerçevesinde, dijital teknolojilerin bilgi akışını kontrol etme gücü ve bu gücün cehalet üretimi üzerindeki etkileri incelenmiştir. Meta'nın algoritmalarının ve otomatik sistemlerinin işleyişi, belirli anlatıları bastırırken diğerlerini öne çıkaran bir bilgi manipülasyonu mekanizması olarak işlev görmektedir. Bu, yalnızca bir teknik sorun değil, aynı zamanda teknolojik sistemlerin derinlemesine politik ve ekonomik çıkarlarla şekillendiğini gösteren bir yapısal sorundur.

Bu bağlamda, dijital platformların politik, ekonomik ve kültürel dinamiklerle iç içe geçmiş olduğu vurgulanmaktadır. Özellikle İsrail-Filistin çatışması gibi siyasi olarak hassas konular söz konusu olduğunda, Meta'nın İsrail hükümetiyle yakın iş birliği içinde hareket ettiği ve Filistin yanlısı içeriklerin sansürlenmesinde sistematik bir tutum sergilediği belgelenmiştir. Bu durum, dijital platformların ekonomik çıkarlarının ifade özgürlüğü ve bilgi akışı üzerindeki etkisini açıkça göstermektedir. Meta gibi şirketler, reklam gelirlerini maksimize etme amacıyla, politik açıdan tartışmalı içeriklere karşı taraflı politikalar uygulamaktadır. Bu çifte standart, dijital platformların tarafsız bir bilgi paylaşım alanı olmadığını ve aksine belirli çıkarların hizmetinde olduğunu kanıtlamaktadır.

Çalışma aynı zamanda çözüm önerilerini de ele almıştır. Dijital platformların daha şeffaf, hesap verebilir ve adil hale getirilmesi gereklidir. Meta gibi büyük teknoloji şirketlerinin içerik moderasyonu politikalarını ve algoritmalarını açık bir şekilde açıklaması, kullanıcıların bu süreçlere dair farkındalığını artırabilir. Ayrıca, dijital okuryazarlık düzeylerinin yükseltilmesi ve kullanıcıların algoritmaların işleyişine dair eleştirel bir farkındalık geliştirmesi gereklidir. Bu, yalnızca bireysel kullanıcıların haklarını korumakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda toplumsal düzeyde daha adil bir dijital kültürün oluşmasına katkı sağlar.

Çözüm önerilerinden biri de dijital platformlar arasında rekabetin artırılmasıdır. Alternatif platformların desteklenmesi, monopol yapıların zayıflatılmasına ve ifade özgürlüğünün genişlemesine olanak tanıyabilir. Bununla birlikte, yasal düzenlemeler ve sivil toplum örgütlerinin baskısı, teknoloji şirketlerinin politikalarını daha sorumlu

hale getirmesi için etkili bir araç olabilir. İnsan hakları örgütlerinin Meta'ya yönelik baskıları, belirli politikaların gözden geçirilmesine yol açmış olsa da, bu çabaların sürekliliği gereklidir.

Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma dijital platformların bilgi akışını kontrol etme gücünü ve bu gücün toplumsal, ekonomik ve politik sonuçlarını analiz etmiştir. Meta gibi platformların içerik moderasyonu politikaları, yalnızca bireysel kullanıcıların deneyimlerini değil, aynı zamanda küresel bilgi üretimini ve dağıtımını da şekillendirmektedir. Dijital teknolojilerin bilgi üzerindeki etkilerini anlamak ve bu etkileri daha iyi yönetmek, yalnızca akademik bir mesele değil, aynı zamanda etik bir sorumluluktur. Bu bağlamda, dijital teknolojilerin tasarımından kullanımına kadar her süreçte daha adil ve hesap verebilir politikaların benimsenmesi, hem bireysel hem de toplumsal düzeyde daha bilinçli bir dijital kültürün oluşumuna katkı sağlayabilir.