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Data as power: The mechanics of digital colonialism.

سلطة البيانات: ميكانزمات الاستعمار الرقمي.

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Abstract: This article aims the exploration of the concept of digital colonialism, associated with the prorogation classical imperialism where ancient colonialist and powerful nations. This new form of colonialism resides in the exploitation of data from less developed countries, known as Third World countries. It, also, examines how major tech companies extract personal information without the clear consent of the networks and digital platforms, reinforcing political and ideological alienation, cultural domination and economic inequalities. The article highlights the implications of surveillance capitalism, which allows these entities to manipulate user behavior and public opinion. Furthermore, it discusses the resulting economic dependency and censorship faced by countries in the Global South. Ultimately, the piece calls for advocacy for digital sovereignty and equitable access to technology as essential steps toward resisting digital colonialism which dominating all the peoples as a part of surveillance capitalism.

Keywords: Digital colonialism, big data, surveillance capitalism, Telematics' dependency, digital sovereignty

الملخص:

تستهدف هذه المقالة استكشاف مفهوم الاستعمار الرقمي، وهو شكل حديث من الاستعمار المرتبط بتمديد الإمبريالية التقليدية حيث تستغل الدول الكولونيالية القوية البيانات من المناطق المتخلفة أو التي تعرف ببلدان العالم الثالث. تدرس المقالة كيف تستخرج شركات التكنولوجيا الكبرى المعلومات الشخصية دون موافقة، مما يعزز أوجه عدم المساواة الاقتصادية والهيمنة الثقافية. كما تسلط الضوء على الآثار المترتبة على رأسمالية المراقبة، التي تسمح لهذه الكيانات بالتلاعب بسلوك المستخدمين والرأي العام. علاوة على ذلك، تناقش المقالة التبعية الاقتصادية والرقابة التي تواجهها بلدان الجنوب العالمي نتيجة لذلك. في النهاية، تدعو المقالة إلى الدعوة للسيادة الرقمية وتكافؤ الوصول إلى التكنولوجيات كخطوة أساسية نحو مقاومة الاستعمار الرقمي الذي يهيمن على الجميع، باعتباره جزء من الرأسمالية الرقابية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستعمار الرقمي، البيانات الضخمة، رقابة الرأسمالية، التبعية المعلوماتية، السيادة الرقمية.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is becoming very common to discuss read or hear about books, seminars and webinars dealing with the new form of colonialism¹, especially since big data emerged as new invisible empires that are spanning data power all over the world. In the 21st century, data has become the main resource of technological transformation, social development and economical wealth. It is the resource that transformed all aspects of human life including the ways to deal with relations and emotions, as well as the professional environment since it is known as « resource of all resources »² reigning on top of sovereignty issues. The endogens attributes of information has driven attention of human intelligence to deal with the data deluge registered since the last four decades of the last century.

It drives artificial intelligence, shapes consumer behavior, and underpins the infrastructure of modern governance. Yet, as the world races toward an increasingly digitalized future, the concentration of data ownership and control has sparked a new form of exploitation, known by the neologism of « digital colonialism ». This phenomenon, though less visible than the colonial empires of the past, operates through the same mechanisms of extraction, domination, and subjugation, albeit in the virtual realm, without any apparent consequences as it is the case with past colonization.

Digital colonialism is not defined by physical occupation of land but by the silent capture of personal, social, industrial, military, technological and economic data. Emerging from the Global North, Tech giants amass vast amounts of information from users worldwide, particularly in the

Global South, where regulatory, legal and juridical frameworks are weaker or inexistent and digital infrastructure is mainly outsourced from the North or is very underdeveloped. It is only when data is processed and weaponized that it can transform into an agent and loose its neutral aspect as an element to be the fuel for development and progress. It is the new stage of development that gave data new roles, besides the fact that it maintained the entire characteristics of fueling corporate activities rooted in the whole economic system, impacting the political one, and entrench global power imbalances.

The mechanics of digital colonialism result in the phenomenon of what experts name cultural alienation, which is a systematic to all underdeveloped countries. In fact, it is the cultural invasion in a totally new uncontrolled form that is taking place since tech corporations has hand on data collection and processing, without any ethics. It always ends in the homogenization of cultural elements and heritage through digital contents disseminated on social networks and digital platforms. The case is reinforced by newly established agent, namely algorithms that prioritize dominant content in order to maximize engagement, adoption of new culture, languages, and neglect traditions often marginalized by Western-centric digital culture, and the spread of standardized options. This is a sort of digital assimilation of the users connected on networks and platforms, where communities are radically disconnected from their own cultural and ideological heritage and taken by hand to conform to dominant narratives on the Hollyweb.

Delving into the mechanics of digital colonialism, this study will be exploring

how data extraction, algorithmic control, and platform monopolies perpetuate the newly established form of imperialism, after the military, the cultural and the economical ones have been eclipsed. In order to achieve this role axis of investigation have been traced. First, it will examine the role of multinational corporations as the new colonial powers, encouraged by the complicity of governments in enabling data exploitation. Second, it will certainly illuminate the hidden structures of power in the digital age. This might provoke a real concern to uncover issues of the emerging data's power as colonizing tools. Furthermore, this scientific contribution attempts to the dialectic relation between data as a resource and data as an agent of establishing colonialism rules in countries, lacking the digital infrastructure, by focusing on how its extraction and use perpetuate global inequalities.

The research strategy involves analyzing the essence of the notions that accompanies the neologism of digital colonialism in order to introduce historical parallels between data exploitation and traditional colonialism. The study will also be highlighting the ways in which data has become a new frontier for resource to colonize spirits, install norms and build standard culture in the whole world, by harvesting data in digital ranches, as machines harvest wheat, without adequate consent or compensation. Tech corporations might argue that this is done in compensation for providing digital infrastructure for surfing and satisfying whatever purpose. The systemic nature of digital colonialism has becomes an endogen characteristic of data just because, tech corporations have uncover its use in economic growth and social emancipation.

Additionally, this study explores the geopolitical implications of data ownership, because countries are becoming dependant in the usage of data in all daily life. No country can avoid the new form of digital colonialism, unless it stops the use of digital infrastructure. Controlling data means simply that one's has the immaterial authority to shape the balance of power in the digital era. And this is what all is about in this study which attempts to clear dark sides of the digital imperialism, that is spreading its wings on the entire world.

2. Notions of definition of the neologism:

Although discussions about data colonialism are relatively new, the concept is one of the major topics which are being considered by experts, analysts, economics, and others sociologists because the implications go very deep in the sociological systems of colonised societies. The neologism has been the subject of many different definitions. As a matter of fact, the privilege of having forged the concept returns to Ulises Mejias and Nick Couldry who forged and elaborated the concept of data colonialism which stands for digital imperialism as a modern form of colonization where powerful tech corporations exert control over the digital infrastructure and data in developing countries. In this sense the authors defines data colonialism as:

« Our new colonial reality entails new processes of data extraction that are changing education, healthcare, agriculture, policing, the way we talk to each other and the way we judge each other, and many other areas besides. Which is why this latest stage in colonialism's development requires a new term: data

colonialism, a social order in which the continuous extraction of data from our lives generates massive wealth and inequality on a global scale »³

Everybody agree upon the fact that if « colonialism was a complicated project that required complicated enterprises », the digital form of colonialism « involve virtual territories of our datafied lives »⁴, which would provide appropriate ways to expand domination, achieve all kind of alienation, eliminate resistance and break resilience as it necessary to create a human model that fit into the shape⁵ of the intended 'prosumer'⁶. For their part Wana and Qi, consider neo-colonialism as the fact to extend;

« The influence of capital in the economic and political spheres through non-directly controlled and covert means, such as economic intervention, cultural infiltration and value transformation. In the age of digital capitalism, the expansion of capital has shifted to the control of data and information resources; this new form of expansion no longer relies on control in the physical realm, but rather influences and controls the economy, society and culture through the collection, processing and use of data by means that are more insidious, more pervasive and more widespread »⁷.

There is a consensus among the scientific community that the very notion of data colonialism is not only considered as the ultimate of stage of colonization, but certainly it uses soft power to achieve strategic goals as it is understood that the human lives are being seized by big corporations treated, transformed in

commercial forms, packaged and monetized to other economic sectors, in order to generate values; for both economic corporations and governments. The latter is basically intended for the purpose of controlling any human movement, behaviour, way of consumption, social relations and the like, resulting in « the abstraction of human experiences to the digital world, a deliberate conception of data as a 'natural resource' from a colonial lens was conceived »⁸ .

Quijano admits that digital colonialism is one important element of the matrix used by colonisation which helped colonial empires to dominate other nations, replacing classic domination which used to be imposed by the conquerors, leading to «the progressive monetization of the world market (...), as well as the control of such large resources, made possible the control of the vast pre-existing web of commercial exchange »⁹. Henceforth, big data's roadmap is not solely based upon commercial issues but goes beyond individual liberty and societal values including the interaction « with the inequalities inherited from neo-colonial geographies, but they are not identical to them. This, we propose, is the process that underlies the Datafication of social good: an ever deeper embedding of corporate power in the production of social knowledge, which goes beyond solutionism »¹⁰.

It is important to state that all investigated notions of the neologism aim at the same meaning which is aligned with historical colonialism, giving one purpose for the concept, the building of new dominating socio-ecosystem to expand power over others.

3. The rise of Data as a global resource of alienation:

As we stand at the crossroads of technological advancement and ethical responsibility, the question is no longer whether data is power, but who wields it at what cost, and what does it cover as colonization's tool to manipulate and control individuals and digital users of platforms and social networks. Another question arises concerning the use of data as a mechanic tool of colonialism as far as cultural alienation and epistemic issue are concerned. Big data has evolved in the shadow of media and communication functions and the profound technological transformations that helped raising scientific and technical information as « the resource of all resources »¹¹. Besides this fact, it is important to note that big data evolved also from the large usage of information by individuals and organizations, as marketing value for wealth and competition. The economic dimension is surely very important for all kind of organizations, since « data provide the key inputs to systems that individuals, institutions, businesses, and the sciences employ in order to understand, explain, manage, regulate, and predict the world we live in and are used to create new innovations, products, and policies »¹².

In the digital age, data has emerged as the defining resource of the 21st century, reshaping economies, societies, and global power structures. Unlike traditional commodities such as oil or gold, data is intangible, infinitely reproducible, and generated continuously by individuals, devices, and systems worldwide. Its value lies not only in its volume but in its ability to predict behavior, optimize systems, and influence decision-making on an unprecedented scale. However, this transformative power has also given rise to a pressing problem: the unequal distribution

of data's benefits and the mechanisms through which it is exploited.

Historical background of digital colonialism has been documented in many sources and one of the most accurate is probably done by the writers of « The costs of connection: How data is colonizing human life and appropriating it for capitalism » where they identified unfamiliar factor of the essence of data colonialism in the realm of technological transformation resulting in the «action of social quantification since human life is being capitalized without any limit, starting from school to governance, without rejecting the right to for further claims, because human life remains an open space for data transformation and exploitation as ever more of our activities and even inner thoughts occur in contexts in which they automatically are made ready for appropriation as data, (...) there is, in principle, no limit to how much of human life can be appropriated and exploited»¹³.

Data colonialism is solely related to human life, leading the future of societies to a capitalistic ideological circles and consuming existences, as we all are familiar with digital tools and all infrastructures dedicated to connection to get in touch with the virtual world, «moreover, the systems are built to improve themselves over time, by keeping a tab on what are the best signals and patterns to look for as more data is fed in »¹⁴.

It is thus, very reasonable to argue that cultural invasion can be seen as the first step toward digital colonialism, because we might consider that data is itself a great part of culture, notably before the large spread of digitalization. As far as, the way and approach that cultural invasion transformed into new form of colonialism, it is important

to clarify the stages of such a transformation. It is undoubtedly true that big data are useful whenever used for the benefit of humanity, even; they are necessary and vital to achieve strategic development in science, research, health, and transportation etc. as they are paving the way to extracting executive guidelines to achieve planned objectives for progress and human development. However, big data is also being adapted as new technological weapons to attain new colonialist objectives.

4. The foundations of digital colonialism

The system of power of digital colonialism is based upon foundations that provide the new form of domination with full elements to maintain it as soft power which does not provoke or induce resistance. Some of these foundations have to be put under scrutiny in order to seize the impact of the new form of public domination, economic dependency and épistémicide¹⁵.

Before detailing the main foundations of digital colonialism, one has to state that it represents the ultimate stage of liberalism and savage capitalism that incited the Occident to search for the geographic extension of wealth by colonizing others territories, exploiting their resource and genocide their peoples.

This section has no pretention to exhaustively present all points of the foundations of digital imperialism which is gaining ground at every technological launching and it will be extremely hard to get independence as it was with the case of historical colonialism, because digital colonialism is a matter of spirit, a matter of human sense and existence¹⁶.

4.1 Infrastructure and access monopolization:

It is quite clear and evident that the very first foundation of digital colonialism is the monopoly of technological assets, upon which all actions of coloniality do take place, such as collecting data, classification and Datafication, cloud storage and retrieval. These actions are made possible by the availability of social networks, data bases, digital platforms, and internet surfing in the paved electronic highways. Digital colonialism starts when numerical platforms and social networks engage « a framework for thinking about tech companies endless appetite for data about where we are, who we are, and what we're doing »¹⁷. Control over digital infrastructure, such as undersea cables, satellites, and different generation networks, is a key pillar of digital imperialism. Dominant powers often build, own, or control the infrastructure that underpins global connectivity; therefore they can follow up, collect and store data about every single step made by users.

Monopolization of infrastructure can lead to unequal access to the internet and digital services, with marginalized regions or communities being left behind or forced to rely on expensive, subpar services. As long as connectivity is strictly provided by information giants' digital colonialism is, certainly, monopolizing technological access to services and thus it ends in one way domination and deepens all aspects of alienation to digital contents available on the net¹⁸.

4.2. Data Control and Exploitation:

Data is a key resource in the digital economy. Digital imperialism often involves the extraction, control, and exploitation of

data from users, often without their full consent or awareness. Information became vital to human development during the last decades of the last century when scientific and technical information was produced in industrial manner leading to information deluge as production could not be controlled and rationally used unless the intervention of industrial process. This is how societies were in a situation where « changes in the way we produce and interact with information lead to changes in the rules we use to govern ourselves, and in the values society needs to protect »¹⁹.

It is mostly important to mention that data control is also a mechanic by which épistémicide is undergone to deliberately ignore others' culture and ideological elements. It has been proved recently during the zionist aggression against Gaza and Palestinians territories. All available networked communications tools have deliberately hidden content with the Palestinian cause, notably content which has awakening consciousness' contribution. Symbols, words, pictures, reels, videos which express no conformity with algorithms rules is just ousted and simply erased from social networks. One of the central questions that need attention in this regard is the relevance and data that is transformed into new values, norms, and interests of big tech companies and thus, «experience explosive commercial success by tapping into a new society of individuals and their demand for individualized consumption», because the implication is that demands of goods and all products and fake needs expressed by people are mainly shaped by an allegiance of the new capitalist market perspective, as it simply refer to a manipulated « psychological process of "individuation" process »²⁰.

In this system, corporations and governments collect, analyze, and monetize vast amounts of personal and behavioral data, often without the explicit consent or awareness of individuals; even most users do not understand what cookies' traceability means in terms of data exploitation. Companies like Google, Facebook, and Amazon have built their empires on the ability and expertise to harvest data at the largest scale possible, using it to predict and influence consumer behavior, optimize advertising, and create new markets' niche.

What is probably more interesting and subtle is to explore the role of the exploitation of data in social control and the manufacture of consent, since it enables surveillance and manipulation on an unprecedented scale, as data is used to monitor populations, influence elections, and enforce social norms. For example, algorithms designed to maximize engagement often amplify divisive content, contributing to polarization and misinformation.

At the same time, governments leverage data collected by corporations for surveillance purposes, blurring the lines between public and private control. This fusion of economic and political power underscores how data control and exploitation are not just features of digital capitalism but its very foundations, perpetuating a cycle of inequality and domination that challenges the ideals of democracy and individual freedom.

4.3. Monopoly of technological innovations, tools and software

The monopoly of technological innovations, tools, and software is a defining feature of digital capitalism, where a handful of corporations dominate the global tech

landscape, controlling access to critical digital infrastructure and resources. Companies like Google, Amazon, Microsoft, and Apple have established near-total control over key areas such as search engines, cloud computing, operating systems, and app marketplaces. This concentration of power allows them to set industry standards, dictate terms of use, and stifle competition, creating a barrier to entry for smaller players and startups. For example, Google's dominance in search engines and online advertising ensures that it captures the majority of global digital ad revenue²¹, while Amazon's control over cloud computing through AWS²² makes it indispensable for businesses worldwide. Such monopolies not only limit innovation but also reinforce the economic and political power of these corporations, enabling them to shape the digital ecosystem to their advantage.

The monopolization of technology also extends to software and tools, where proprietary systems and closed ecosystems lock users into specific platforms, limiting their freedom to choose alternatives. For all tech corporations is a matter of dominance and alienation to control the vast majority of the mobile operating system market, forcing app developers to comply with their rules and pay significant fees to access their user bases. For many users, this seems to be free of charge but tech corporations are paid with our own personal data whenever we click the input data actions is triggered and all our electronic activities on the cyberspace are policed. For example, Microsoft's dominance in productivity software, such as Office Suite, creates dependency among businesses and individuals, making it difficult to transition to open-source or competing solutions. When monopoly is

exerted over software and tools it does generate not only generates massive profits for tech corporations but also allows them to impact the ways technology is used as they are the exclusive owner of the technology and techniques to deal with global guide lines whenever needed. In doing so private are prioritized over user's privacy, security, and autonomy, resulting in a new digital environment where innovation is constrained by the interests of a few powerful entities.

Furthermore, the monopoly of technological innovations has profound implications for countries belonging to the South and third world countries. This is apparently quite clear as the digital divide is getting deeper and can't be dealt with as they lack technologies, tools and software and where access to technology is always mediated, if not monopolized by these dominant corporations. This is another mechanical dynamic which helps dominant tech corporations to perpetuate a form of digital dependency –as dependency was perpetuated during classical colonialism by industrial equipments and the like, because newly independent countries were forced to rely on foreign technologies, jeopardizing the future of these nations. This is always the case when nations rely on Western technology, social media platforms and cloud services, enhancing the power of data which do not exclude any occasion to reduce South's countries sovereignty and arguments, as they are unable -sometimes- to reach fair and just agreements with tech giants. This might be the real, the fierce and savage face of digital capitalism known in the beginning of the third millennium as the world gets more networked and permanently connected.

4.4. Algorithmic control, the spirit of spirit colonialism:

New colonial power exerted by leading technological corporations and capitalist companies hold an unprecedented influence and domination in the most important fields, namely, knowledge, technology management, narrative establishment and futuristic issues related to humanity. Tech corporations are reordering and reinventing cultural, ideological and technological orders, and this is the strongest argument that leads many scholars to identify it as algorithmic colonialism²³. All these operations are not authorized actions since they do not have neither permission, nor legitimacy to technologically control and invade immaterial territories of others nations. For example, Facebook admitted that it is undertaking steps to categorize and map African countries, under humanitarian²⁴ pretexts, for the purpose to make data a sharp weapon by combining « computer vision techniques, population data, and high-resolution satellite imagery to search for built-up structures across the continent. They [Facebook researchers] then created population density maps based on the number of buildings they observed »²⁵.

Algorithmic control is not just a technical issue; it is a political and economic as well. By controlling what users see and engage with, algorithms reinforce the power dynamics of digital colonialism and create the psychological conditions for users to get addicted to connection leading to adaptation of images and other symbolic codes. As far as economic exploitation is concerned algorithms prioritize content that generates revenue for platforms, often at the expense of local creators who lack the resources to

compete. In terms of political influence, algorithms can be used to manipulate public opinion, suppress dissent, or promote specific political agendas, often benefiting external powers. Algorithms, particularly those used in social media platforms and search engines, have become powerful tools that can significantly influence public opinion and political discourse. They are also potent instruments for shaping public opinion and political discourse. These algorithms are designed to maximize user engagement by prioritizing content that is likely to elicit strong emotional reactions, such as outrage or excitement.

To accommodate this fact to reality, one must admits that for example, disinformation campaigns can be strategically deployed to amplify certain narratives while suppressing others, often benefiting specific political or geopolitical interests. A striking example of this manipulation is the way Palestinian content has been systematically restricted on major digital platforms. Reports and studies have shown that posts related to Palestinian perspectives²⁶, particularly those critical of Israeli destructive and criminal policies, are often flagged, removed, or reprioritized by algorithms²⁷.

Using vague and unclear pretexts subscribed in legal moderation policies, digital platforms and social networks have always the right to do any suppression of content - very frequently- as they do classification of content moderation according to their own interests political, cultural or ideological. For instance, claim of "incitement to violence" or "violations of community guidelines" are always used as pretext of content's censorship. Palestinian latest war has been clear example of this kind of case

as all social networks –except perhaps telegram- have been using the fallacious claims to ignore any message that expresses in favor of Palestinian cause. Over time, this can skew public perception, polarize societies, and undermine democratic processes by promoting agendas that serve the interests of external powers rather than the public good. As far as cultural domination is concerned, algorithms can jump from political to cultural sphere to achieve alienation of young generations and marginalize local cultures and promote globalized content; algorithms ensure that the cultural norms of the Global North remain dominant in all fields without any exceptions including scientific research and methods' norms and principals.

Suppressed Palestinian content highlights a broader issue of algorithmic bias and the lack of transparency in content moderation practices for all similar contents as far as conflicts are concerned. Social networks are programmed not to support defiant contents that do not comply with the implicit commands of algorithms contained in contents' treatment and analysis. Programmed algorithmic control can be adjusted according to specific political, cultural or ideological objectives, especially when governments might intervene to 'order' an adjustment of their algorithms to reduce the echo of certain voices in order that they will not reach a large audience. Once more the example of the case of Palestine is fully expressive of this specific situation. We have been witnessing that a large –if not- all contents in favor of the Palestinian cause is silenced in many cases. Activists and journalists reported a lot of instances where their discourse was simply shadow-banned, hidden from broader audiences without any stereotyped

explanation, or convincing reasons, although the content was documenting human rights abuses or political struggles.

5. Implications of digital colonialism:

What looks like a simple information treatment as a librarian activity is transformed into a real enterprise to spiritually dominate the behaviour of the people all over the world because Data control and exploitation are central pillars of digital capitalism, a system where data has become the most valuable resource, driving economic growth and power dynamics in the 21st century. It seems that the asymmetrical relationship between data collectors and data producers is deeply rooted in the in digital capitalism as was the exploitation of colonized countries where resources have only a unique destination. Hence, it is quite convincing for digital imperialism that the ownership of data produced by users in their daily digital activities is directly transferred to digital infrastructure providers'²⁸. Moreover, they have generally no ownership or control over data they are generating and ignore what doo tech corporations do with their personal data.

Domains of data exploitation are numerous and cannot be listed in this study as they vary from simple economic targeted advertising to people tracing, often at the expense of user privacy and autonomy. Such activities result in a sociological colonialist system where wealth and power are solely concentrated in the hand of powerful tech corporations that can even bargain others sovereignty and privacy in order to let them exploit the digital infrastructure, as the majority of users remain unaware of the extent to which their data is being datatified. Data exploitation is surrounded by the lack of transparency in

how these algorithms are operating, and this dark situation does further exacerbate the problem, because it results in a situation where it becomes nearly impossible to hold anyone accountable for the misuse of treated data. In the same sense, algorithms can serve as both a weaponized tool and an agent of control, shaping public opinion in directions that benefit powerful interests at the expense of democratic values, personal liberty and state sovereignty as we have demonstrated in this study some of the complicated implications of the spread of algorithms in digital life.

5.1. Technological Dominance:

It must be understood that data is neutral element; it is the way they are conceived, treated and used for the purpose for which are designated which render them political and ideological, Big data is transforming human life from rebellion to sociological conformity by technological tools because new rulers' orthodoxy of the new era impose a radically different vision of the world, where every individual is chained by technological agents that used to be simple but very helpful tools. As Kitchin and Lauriault put it data « are constitutive of the ideas, techniques, technologies, people, systems, and contexts that conceive, produce, process, manage, and analyze them” – data are not ever fully “raw” but are always “cooked” » ²⁹.

What is meant by technological dominance? In fact, it simply refers to the overwhelming control that a handful tech corporations belonging to the North hemisphere are dominating the cyberspace exerting a full monopoly and power over all available opportunities of digital infrastructure, distribution, and use of digital technologies. Technological dominance impacts the

shaping the global economic, social, and political landscape. It even, can hinder any attempted alternative for development and progress especially the one related to science, knowledge and technology because companies like Google, Amazon, Facebook (now Meta), Apple, and Microsoft ³⁰ - known collectively as the GAFAM- control critical sectors in the digital environment. Their influence extends beyond markets, as they set the standards for how technology is used, govern the flow of information, and even influence public opinion and policy. Every single aspect of digital life is determined by the GAFAM's technology governed by biased algorithms to shape the future for the coming generations. Concentration of power allows these technological entities to act as gatekeepers of all outputs from the digital world. Often, GAFAM are prioritizing ideological precepts and profit over any ethical considerations like privacy, equity, and transparency.

The roots of technological dominance lie in the network effects that favor large, established players. Once a company achieves a dominant position, it becomes increasingly difficult for competitors to challenge its supremacy. One used strategy is the containment of any new competitor in the field as GAFAM position in economic and social environment gives them the financial power to tender generous financial offer to ensure that businesses and governments remain dependent on its products, even when few alternatives exist. This is known by self-reinforcing cycle of dominance maintaining technological dependence and reinforcing monopoly, where the rules are set by tech giants. Moreover, the acquisition of potential competitors consolidates power, leaving

little room for diversity in the tech ecosystem and annihilates any competitive case in the physical sphere of tech infrastructure.

The United States and China, for instance, are the primary hubs of technological innovation and control, with their respective tech giants dominating global markets. The tech case between USA and China is just a reminding trait of the cold war between Occident and the ex USSR. The duopoly creates a digital bipolarity, where other nations are forced to align with one of these two powers or risk being left far behind, especially with the implementation of digital technology in the sociological ecosystem of all nations. Suffice to give the TikTok political and ideological wrangle, as a concrete example between the US administration during the Biden ruling and the digital platform. It has already experienced many similar cases in Turkey, Philippine and other countries, refusing to pay a cost of their own technological sovereignty, as they have acknowledged « that data determinism ruled in a new, more expanded social field. It still worked according to the logic of finance capital »³¹.

5.2. Epéstimicide and cultural and ideological influence:

The cultural and ideological influence of dominant tech corporations and platforms is one of the most pervasive yet often overlooked aspects of technological dominance. Companies like Google, Facebook (Meta), Twitter, and TikTok have become central to how people communicate, consume information, and form their worldviews. These platforms shape cultural norms, values, and behaviors by controlling the flow of information and prioritizing certain types of content over others. Social

media algorithms are designed to maximize engagement, and are often promoting sensationalist or polarizing content that captures attention but may distort reality. This creates a feedback loop where users are exposed to content that reinforces their existing beliefs, contributing to the rise of echo chambers and the erosion of shared cultural narratives. In this way, tech companies wield immense power over public discourse, influencing everything from political opinions to social trends.

The cultural influence of these platforms extends beyond content to the very structure of human interaction. Social media has redefined how people form relationships, express identity, and engage with communities, often prioritizing virtual connections over face-to-face interactions. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok have popularized new forms of self-expression, such as curate lifestyles and viral challenges, which can shape societal standards of beauty, success, and behavior. However, this influence is not neutral; it is driven by profit motives that prioritize user engagement and data collection. For instance, the constant pressure to present an idealized version of life on social media has been linked to mental health issues, particularly among young people. Thus, the cultural impact of these platforms is deeply intertwined with their economic objectives, often at the expense of individual well-being.

Ideologically, the dominance of Western tech companies has led to the global spread of Western cultural values and norms, often at the expense of local traditions and identities, leading to real épistémicide. This phenomenon is the deepest expression of digital cultural imperialism, because data and connection's provider platforms are

always exporting Western ideals of individualism, consumerism, and liberalism to other parts of the world. Hence, it is quite clear that all cinematographic productions and media's contents do express the tendency towards movies and American TV shows dominate global streaming platforms, shaping perceptions of success, relationships, and societal roles.

Dominance does not stop to the edge of western culture dissemination amongst natives but is maintained until a global épistémicide is achieved. The latter undergoes some actions until attaining the homogenizing culture, marginalizing local voices, and eroding cultural diversity. In some cases, this ideological influence has sparked resistance, as communities seek to preserve their cultural heritage and assert their own narratives in the digital space. This case is clearly expressed in the fact that « today, globally operating internet and tech companies decide which societal actors may have access to data generated via their respective platforms, and define in what ways they are made available »³².

Moreover, the impact of the ideological influence produced by tech platforms cannot be limited to cultural content, produced on minute's basis, but does extend to governance and societal values. The design of these platforms, often, reflects the libertarian ideals of Silicon Valley, emphasizing free speech and minimal regulation. However, this approach has led to challenges such as the proliferation of hate speech, misinformation, and extremist content from the western political and cultural milieu. The cultural and ideological influence of tech companies, therefore, is not just a matter of shaping individual beliefs but also of defining the values and

norms that underpin societies. Addressing this influence leads to a dramatic reality of the power dynamics at play to commit a deliberate épistémicide upon cultural heritage of others³³.

5.3 Mapping and Datafication:

The era of big data challenges the way we live and interact with the world. It is transforming every aspect of our daily life, including the way of thinking and replacing the human intellect by digital guidance. This is done by mapping and the use Datafication which are central mechanisms of data colonialism, a modern form of exploitation where data is extracted, codified, and used to exert control over populations, particularly in the Global South. In this context, mapping people and behavior, refers to the process of creating digital representations of physical and social spaces, often through technologies³⁴. It is also used to monitor resources, track populations, control subversives' activities.

This matches historical colonial processes and practices where maps were used to claim and exploit territories, as it was expressed in the deluge of Hollywood production's movies and series. This is a truly a fast move from Hollywood to Hollyweb as it operates through digital infrastructures that extract value from data rather than physical resources.

Datafication is the most important stage in the achievement of data colonialism as it is always referring to the transformation of social, economic, and cultural activities into quantifiable data. In the context of data colonialism, Datafication enables the systematic harvesting of personal and collective information, which is then processed, analyzed, and monetized by

powerful entities, primarily in the Global North. Thus, dependency is created as a new process crystallized by amongst communities which remain stripped of control –all the times- over their own data and subjected to decisions made by subtle, unknown and distant algorithms which report directly to the corporations' headquarters. There is no need to confirm that all platforms are programmed to transform their technical expertise into methodology to calculate at all time user interactions aiming to fuel targeted advertising, surfing traditions and behavioral manipulation. Governments for their parts are using the same process of Datafication to enhance surveillance and governance.

It is quite clear that when associated mapping and Datafication play a vital role in the reinforcement of the –already existing- the asymmetrical power dynamics of data colonialism and this in turn, perpetuate a cycle of extraction and exploitation that echoes the legacy of historical colonialism throughout countries of the global South. The multifarious functions of mapping and Datafication go further in the role of domination as it ensures to erase local knowledge and drastically reduce the autonomy under such colonialism.

Besides, others implications upon indigenous communities arise, as all ways of not only understanding but also interacting with their environments is neglected when the mapping and Datafication is done. Impact of marginalization reduces the implementation of traditional learning systems and the massive usage of knowledge sidelined or replaced by standardized, data-driven models imposed by colonialist parameters endlessly.

Examples of digital mapping projects are numerous important in the cyberspace.

The tendency to ignore or overwrite indigenous land use practices could be one of the large listing, undermining indigenous cultural heritage and scientific knowledge, perpetuating the global epistemic violence, as the dominant power continues to reinforce its dogmatic paradigms, giving no chances for local alternatives to emerge. Thus, mapping and Datafication are not merely technical processes but are deeply political, reinforcing the structural inequalities of data colonialism and deepening the divide between those who control data and those whose lives are rendered into data for others' benefit. All this is due because « Datafication made text indexable and thus searchable. And it permitted an endless stream of textual analysis. We now can discover when certain words or phrases were used for the first time, or became popular, knowledge that sheds new light on the spread of ideas and the evolution of human thought across centuries and in many languages »³⁵.

5.3. Economic Dependency and Inequality:

On the economic level it is important to say that digital colonialism perpetuates economic dependency by creating a system where nations in the South are forced to rely on the technological infrastructure, platforms, and services provided by corporations as it is the case in classical colonialism, where every single tool is shipped from the North to the underdeveloped countries un strong needs. The dependency occurred simultaneously when data is generated by users of digital networks, and the infrastructure exerts data extraction to categorize the users and

forward them to its web services including cloud computation, as it is rooted in the control that dominant tech companies over critical digital resources, such as cloud computing, social media platforms, and e-commerce systems.

Amazon Web Services (AWS) and Microsoft Azure, for example are dominating the world market of cloud computing, making it nearly impossible for newly digitalized countries and underdeveloped nations to build independent digital infrastructures. This specific case ends with these countries and nations in a locked cycle of external reliance, with no chance to gain a full independent mobility in the cyberspace, as they must pay for access to GAFAM foreign-owned technologies, at the cost of developing their own local innovations.

This data-driven economy thrives on the extraction of value from users, who are often reduced to mere data points in a larger system of profit generation. The control over data grants these entities unprecedented power, enabling them to shape not only markets but also social and political landscapes. In fueling their economy and wealth Western corporations creates dependency for South countries and this is what Zuboff puts it in terms of « the prediction imperative » before transforming it to « extraction imperative», because «competition for surveillance revenues eventually reached a point at which the volume of surplus became a necessary»³⁶. Henceforth, it is important to rewind the fact, that digital colonialism fosters economic inequality. Tech corporations collect vast amounts of data from users in developing countries, and transform the raw data into various products often without

consent, using the data outputs as fuel for their wealth and develop their business models. Social media platforms are good examples of extracting all kind of outcomes through monetizing user data through targeted advertising, selling user's privacy in the capitalist market sourcing economic benefits and perpetuating permanent control of the cyberspace technology. Moreover, underdeveloped countries are still unable to get in the most profitable manner the benefits of the widespread access to online education and services, enjoy high-speed internet, advanced digital tools because financial limited resources do not allow the payment of high costs of access.

6. CONCLUSION

Digital colonialism has its own specific weapons to conclude all kind of practices especially that related to conquer users of digital platform and social networks. All started in the last decades of last century when data became a resource of all other resources. Giants of technology have cleared ways to invest in an immaterial weapon to colonize countries without classical army.

Algorithms are invisible but are the most efficient architects that shape our digital life according to injunctions from tech corporations to maintain users in an electronic bubble so that they can easily follow up and control our online experiences. They, also determine what we see, hear, and engage with, shaping our perceptions, preferences, and behaviors. While algorithms are often portrayed as neutral tools designed to optimize user experiences, they are deeply embedded in the power structures of digital colonialism. If we look to the current genocide

undergoing genocide in Gaza, one can easily confirm the fact that it has not been overlooked for ignorance of the concept's parameters, but it has been neglected for mainstream medias' contents and ideological motivations programmed on digital tools and social networks.

The first and utmost concluding point is to confirm that digital colonialism represents modern extension of historical colonial practices and it has just tuned them to conform to the new type of countries' exploitation and people's alienation, where dominant powers and corporations use digital technologies instead of bullets and bombs to annihilate and cause destruction of people, vestiges and cause épéstimicides. As in the case of historical colonialism, digital one perpetuates economic, scientific and cultural dependency, resulting in ideological alienation. Practices of tech corporations in the domains of data extraction, platform monopolies administration, and most certainly, algorithmic control, technological conglomerates do consolidate their power, exacerbate global inequalities and marginalize indigenous communities which use digital tools and social networks, because they are lacking the needed resources to resist or compete in the digital economy.

The monopoly exerted by these technology giants of digital infrastructure, all kind of software and data put the sovereignty of countries belonging to the South at jeopardy. On the cultural level it is done through permanent actions aimed to achieve cultural homogenization threatening the total eradication of local narratives and traditions.

Decolonizing the digital sphere involves reclaiming data sovereignty, fostering local innovation, and challenging exploitative

practices. Ultimately, a just digital future demands dismantling colonial structures and creating its own global digital ecosystem.

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³ Mejjias and Couldry (2024): The costs of connection: How Op Cite p 18.

⁴ Ibid: 13.

⁵ Ritzer G. & N. Jurgenson, (2010): Production, Consumption, Prosumption: The nature of capitalism in the age of the digital 'prosumer'. Journal of Consumer Culture, 10 (1), 13-36.

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¹⁹ Schönberger and Cukier A revolution that Big Data... Op Cite P, 157)

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²¹ Joignot: 2016

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²⁶ This was not the case with Zionist and Israeli publications where a large amount of content has been posted by Zionism allies on digital platforms

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²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Data is generated by users on all digital tools, including social networks, commercial platforms, digital applications, and the like; when browsing the internet, using social media, shopping, downloading or engaging with smart devices. Basically this is done when users are in the following situations: 1. Input Actions: Users generate data through typing, clicking, or voice commands on devices. 2. Interactions: Data is created via social media posts, searches, messages, or online transactions. 3. Sensors: Devices like smartphones collect data via GPS, cameras, or accelerometers. 4. Behavior Tracking: Websites and apps track user activity, preferences, and browsing history.

²⁹ Kitchin & Lauriault: Toward Critical Data Studies Op Cite, P, 5-6.

³⁰ These Tech giants corporations are known by the acronym of GAFAM, which does not include all American dominating companies in the field of digital colonialism, because some activities are outsourced through other companies, that provides software and very sophisticated parts used in digital colonialism's technology. In China another acronym was created through the Chinese giants in the Tech fields to counter any American impact upon its people. The equivalent of GAFAM in China is often referred to as BATX or BATH, representing the dominant tech giants in the country. These companies are: - Baidu (equivalent to Google) – A leading search engine and AI company. - Alibaba (equivalent to Amazon) – A massive e-commerce and cloud computing platform. - Tencent (equivalent to Facebook) – A social media, gaming, and fintech giant (owner of WeChat and QQ). - Xiaomi or Huawei (sometimes included as the "X" or "H") – Xiaomi is a major electronics and Smartphone manufacturer, while Huawei is a global leader in telecommunications and consumer electronics. These companies dominate China's digital landscape and have significant influence globally, much like GAFAM in the West. China is a closed market for western big tech corporations, and its own digital immunity is a matter of sovereignty.

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