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Digital Taylorism and Reification: A Literature Review on the Recolonization of Life

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study critically examines the intertwined dynamics of Digital Taylorism and digital colonialism in reshaping labor relations and power structures within digital capitalism. Digital Taylorism refers to the algorithmic management and surveillance of labor, fragmenting and optimizing work at the expense of workers' autonomy. Digital colonialism, meanwhile, extends these practices globally, as technology corporations from the Global North impose digital infrastructures and labor regimes on the Global South, deepening dependency, data extraction, and exploitation. Using the Critical-Humanist Political Economy of Communication and Lukács's theory of reification, the study explores how these processes commodify not only labor but also public life, transforming culture and social relations into monetizable resources. The research highlights the urgent need for awareness and regulation to counteract the pervasive commodification and erosion of autonomy under digital capitalism, ultimately advocating for digital spaces that prioritize public interest, labor justice, and cultural sovereignty.

Dijital Taylorizm ve Şeyleşme: Yaşamın Yeniden Sömürgeleştirilmesi Üzerine Bir Literatür Taraması

MAKALE BİLGİSİ	ÖZ
	Bu çalışma, Dijital Taylorizm ve dijital sömürgeciliğin dijital kapitalizm çağında emek ilişkilerini ve güç yapılarını nasıl birlikte dönüştürmekte olduğunu eleştirel bir bakışla incelemektedir. Dijital Taylorizm, emeğin algoritmik olarak yönetilmekte ve sürekli gözetim altında tutulmakta olduğu, parçalanarak verimlilik ve veri çıkarımı uğruna işçilerin özerkliğinin zedelenmekte olduğu bir süreci ifade etmektedir. Dijital sömürgecilik ise, Küresel Kuzey'deki teknoloji şirketlerinin dijital altyapı ve emek rejimlerini Küresel Güney'e dayatmakta ve bağımlılık, veri çıkarımı ile sömürüyü küresel ölçekte derinleştirmektedir. Çalışma, İletişimin Eleştirel-Hümanist Ekonomi Politiği yaklaşımını ve Lukács'ın şeyleşme kuramını kullanarak bu süreçlerin yalnızca emeği değil, kamusal yaşamı da metalaştırmakta ve kültürü ile toplumsal ilişkileri paraya çevrilebilir kaynaklara dönüştürmekte olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Araştırma, dijital kapitalizmde özerkliğin ve kamusal yararın korunması için farkındalık ve düzenleme ihtiyacının arttığını vurgulamakta, dijital alanların toplumsal çıkar, adalet ve kültürel egemenlik için yeniden kazanılması gerektiğini savunmaktadır.

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Introduction

The rapid integration of digital technologies into the organization of labor has brought about a fundamental transformation in work and power relations. This transformation, often framed as Digital Taylorism, extends classic principles of control, surveillance, and efficiency from the industrial era into contemporary digital workplaces. However, unlike earlier periods, the digital age is characterized by algorithmic management, pervasive data tracking, and automated oversight, all of which reduce the role of the worker to a function within complex, data-driven systems. This shift creates new forms of alienation, diminishes worker autonomy, and reshapes the relationship between labor and capital in ways that demand critical examination. The central problem addressed in this study is how Digital Taylorism, in combination with digital colonialism, functions as a mechanism for deepening the commodification and control of labor. Digital Taylorism fragments work processes, embeds surveillance at every level, and marginalizes human agency in favor of algorithmic efficiency. At the same time, digital colonialism extends these dynamics on a global scale, as dominant technology companies impose digital infrastructures, platforms, and labor regimes on less developed regions, reinforcing inequalities and creating new forms of dependency. The unchecked expansion of these models risks reducing all aspects of human activity to data points for extraction and profit, intensifying social and economic disparities.

The main purpose of this research is to critically analyze the intersection of Digital Taylorism and digital colonialism as core drivers of the reification and commodification of labor in digital capitalism. By exploring how these mechanisms operate in tandem, the study seeks to reveal the processes through which labor is transformed into a quantifiable, controllable resource and how these processes are exported across the globe under the guise of technological progress. This focus is especially relevant considering ongoing debates about labor rights, data justice, and the democratic governance of digital spaces. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to understanding the profound societal consequences of algorithmic management and global platformization. As digital systems become ever more embedded in daily life, their ability to shape not only work but also social relations, identities, and collective experiences grows. By foregrounding issues of autonomy, equity, and democracy, the study aims to inform ongoing discussions among scholars, policymakers, and activists who seek to resist the pervasive commodification of life under digital capitalism.

There is an urgent need for this type of inquiry, as the rapid pace of digital transformation frequently outstrips the development of regulatory frameworks, ethical standards, and protective labor policies. Without critical intervention, digital capitalism threatens to erode fundamental rights and deepen global inequalities, leaving workers and societies increasingly vulnerable to exploitation and control. This research is limited by its reliance on a literature-based methodology and a focus on theoretical and structural analysis. While it seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the current landscape, it does not include primary empirical data or case studies of individual organizations or regions. Instead, the study adopts a critical, interdisciplinary perspective to highlight the most salient trends and dynamics shaping labor and power in the digital era.

In the study, literature review method is used as data collection method. The study uses the Critical-Humanist Political Economy of Communication approach. The Critical-Humanist Political Economy of Communication approach, developed by Vincent Mosco, focuses on human activity—specifically labor and social practices—in the field of communication and media studies. This approach analyzes society and communication through a dialectic between structures (such as class, power, and commodification structures) and agency (such as labor, social movement unionism, and praxis). In Mosco's framework, communication research is guided by social democratic values like democratic participation and the public good. This approach emphasizes the analysis of class relations and struggles, while also incorporating the examination of other social structures, such as gender, race, and social movements. Mosco stresses that Political Economy of Communication should encompass both class analysis and domination analysis. By addressing both structural and individual levels of social processes and practices, he argues that a critical-humanist perspective can support the potential for social change (Fuchs, 2024: 127).

Digital Taylorism

Workers laboring under the surveillance and control of capital is one of the core characteristics of capitalist production relations. Taylorism, a term coined to describe the scientific management principles laid out by F.W. Taylor, focuses on rationalizing and standardizing work to boost efficiency and profit. It involves breaking down tasks, implementing performance-based pay, and monitoring and measuring productivity. So influential is this logic that it even affected the founding cadres of the Soviet Union: It is telling, for instance, that Lenin himself repeatedly called for the study of Frederick W. Taylor's "scientific management" from the perspective of its application in Soviet industry. Lenin argued that Taylor's system—like all capitalist advances—represented both a form of refined, ruthless bourgeois exploitation and a set of significant scientific achievements in analyzing mechanical motions, eliminating unnecessary and inefficient practices, determining precise working methods, and developing optimal incentives and control mechanisms during labor processes. As Taylorism intensifies the antagonism between capital and labor, the feasibility of coordinating interests declines, making recourse to coercive measures increasingly inevitable (Braverman, 2008: 44).

Developed in the context of Fordism, Taylorism is a work model designed to maintain control in mass production settings, aiming to deskill labor by dividing tasks so that less skilled, more affordable workers can perform them. This deskilling process has progressed alongside the rise of automation and computerization. The application of Taylorism through digital technologies is known as Digital Taylorism, which emphasizes

datafication of work, increased monitoring, reduced employee involvement, and intensified performance oversight. In this model, human labor supports the functions of computers, artificial intelligence, and algorithms, leaving the remaining tasks as routine, menial work. Digital Taylorism has led to a marked increase in surveillance practices. Surveillance encompasses methods used by capital to monitor and discipline labor to control the processes of production and distribution. It includes economic and political surveillance; in the latter, individuals face potential organized violence if they engage in undesirable behaviors, monitored by political actors such as security agencies. Economic surveillance involves the market's coercion of individuals to buy consumer goods or produce more commodities, with electronic systems gathering and utilizing economic behavior data to perpetuate capitalist relations. In addition, Digital Taylorism enforces regulations that extend working hours by shortening breaks and vacation periods, pushing workers to produce more within shorter periods. The core logic of surveillance is to accelerate labor's pace, thereby increasing surplus value production. Examples of surveillance within Digital Taylorism include wearable technologies, cloud applications, big data, GPS tracking, and customer rating systems (Yılmaz, 2024: 65-66). As Taylorism intensifies the antagonism between capital and labor, the feasibility of coordinating interests declines, making recourse to coercive measures increasingly inevitable (Burawoy, 2015: 78).

Digital Taylorism increasingly enables the routinization of tasks—even those that might otherwise require specialized education—by stripping away the independent judgment and creativity often linked with the knowledge economy. To reduce costs and tighten control, firms strive to capture and codify workers' tacit knowledge, converting what was once an individual asset into a standardized organizational resource. Such processes allow companies to redeploy labor flexibly on a global scale, with standardized practices and shared technological platforms facilitating integration across different sites (Brown, Lauder & Ashton, 2011: 75–76). This model not only diminishes the autonomy of many white-collar roles but also drives a new stratification within professional occupations. Digital Taylorism divides knowledge workers into distinct categories: a small group of "developers" are afforded the opportunity for innovation and decision-making, while the majority take on "demonstrator" or "drone" roles, carrying out pre-defined, highly standardized tasks—often mediated by software—with limited scope for independent thought. This dynamic not only intensifies competition among workers but also accelerates the deskilling of many professional jobs, making them susceptible to digitalization, global outsourcing, and downward mobility, regardless of workers' educational credentials (Brown, Lauder & Ashton, 2011: 81). In contemporary scholarship, the development of algorithms extends beyond the traditional confines of computer science, mathematics, and engineering, encompassing a close engagement with disciplines like statistics and operational analysis (Christian & Griffiths, 2017: 18). Therefore, at this point it can be said that Digital Taylorism is a governmentality based on algorithms.

Algorithms now play a central role in governing work practices within the digital platform economy, embodying a new form of control known as algorithm management. This process involves using algorithms to make data-driven decisions about matching supply (workers) and demand (customers) while simultaneously monitoring and directing worker behavior. For example, companies like Uber utilize algorithms not only to link drivers with customers but also to influence both parties' choices and guide drivers' actions on the job. Algorithm management extends Taylorism's principles of close supervision and efficiency enhancement to a digital context, where automated systems replace human managers in coordinating and controlling labor. Algorithm management creates an environment where workers experience platforms as opaque systems or "black boxes," making it difficult for them to understand the logic behind decisions like job assignments and rewards. This opacity leads to uncertainty and dissatisfaction, as workers cannot easily anticipate how their actions impact outcomes, contrasting with traditional forms of direct managerial oversight. Digital Taylorism thus reflects a shift where algorithms function as virtual supervisors, optimizing and controlling workflows, particularly on online labor platforms, where algorithms allocate tasks, track progress, and enforce standards automatically. This algorithm-driven control contributes to a more regimented and impersonal work environment, where labor is monitored and directed without direct human intervention (Park & Ryoo, 2023: 273).

Algorithmic systems now govern the work of millions globally, transforming organizational management by automating oversight traditionally handled by human supervisors. According to recent estimates, over 19 million people have obtained work via online freelancing platforms, with numbers increasing, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This growth reflects the broad adoption of algorithmic management across sectors, affecting both platform-based work like food delivery and traditional jobs where algorithms now monitor remote office tasks. This phenomenon, first conceptualized as "algorithmic management," involves software assuming managerial roles and utilizing supporting institutional systems to oversee work activities. Algorithmic management represents both a continuation and an evolution of historical management principles. Echoing 19th-century factory settings, sometimes referred to as "scientific management 2.0," this digital iteration intensifies standardization, labor decomposition, digital surveillance, and metric-based assessment. Across various economic sectors, work is increasingly fragmented into quantifiable tasks, which are continuously monitored and accessed only through online platforms. This model, described as "logged labor," is prevalent in gig economy roles, but similar practices are emerging in traditional workplaces as well, marking a shift in how labor is structured and controlled. The rise of algorithmic management, often termed "Uberization," aligns with neoclassical economic theories that shift responsibility and risk onto individual workers. Paradoxically, this approach leads to higher levels of control over supposedly autonomous workers, facilitated by algorithms that track, assign, and evaluate tasks. The implications extend beyond

individual workplaces; scholars argue that the growing decision-making power of algorithms calls for deeper exploration of ethical considerations and the limitations of automated oversight. The pervasive tracking embedded in these systems reflects the logic of surveillance capitalism, now extending to nearly all facets of human life, with algorithmic management reshaping not only work but broader societal interactions (Noponen et al., 2024: 1696). The governmentality of digital Taylorism is largely associated with the datafication of the work process.

The imperative of datafication has driven a transformative process within labor systems and society at large, requiring comprehensive monitoring and oversight of machines, workers, consumers, and the relationships among them. Often circumventing legal constraints, these datafication practices enable the collection of behavioral data, revealing highly sensitive information about individuals and communities. Such data is used to control and automate intellectual labor areas—such as communication, management, and even emotional engagement—that were previously resistant to real subsumption and automation. As a result, intellectual labor is increasingly subjected to control mechanisms akin to those governing manual, wage-based work. According to reports on the digital transformation of EU labor markets, data from workers and consumers, typically contributed without remuneration, accumulates as a form of "intangible capital" that has the potential to ultimately replace their labor. The lack of social protections in this digital environment and the difficulty of securing informed consent based on data protection guidelines make it challenging to leverage data in collective bargaining processes, thereby undermining both labor power and consumer privacy. The datafication and virtual automation of everyday life allow for the extraction of knowledge about human behavior that ultimately serves the interests of those controlling the machinery. The development of platform technologies as tools for organizing and transforming labor has further facilitated the subsumption of intellectual labor, albeit in uneven and fragmented ways. In the gig economy, for instance, digital platforms often reorganize exchange processes to heighten price competition within labor markets but do not necessarily revolutionize the labor process itself. This structure represents a form of partial subsumption, where capital extracts profits through the reorganization of exchange rather than through direct transformation of the labor process. Digital Taylorism, the new model of management facilitated by algorithms, intensifies control over labor, enforcing standardization and continuous monitoring of work. In doing so, it effectively restructures labor processes through digital means, establishing a form of managerial oversight unprecedented in traditional work environments (Cole et al., 2021: 92). Therefore, it can be said that Digital Taylorism accelerates the automation of business processes.

The relationship between digital Taylorism and artificial intelligence has become increasingly pronounced as recent AI advancements have made algorithmic management both more powerful and less transparent. As Barrat (2020: 11–34, 50, 86, 126, 146) notes, AI is no longer limited to executing predefined tasks but now possesses the ability to self-improve and adapt in ways that

may escape human oversight. This evolution deepens workplace dependency on intelligent systems, shifting control from human managers to opaque, autonomous algorithms. Thus, digital Taylorism is being redefined through the integration of AI, amplifying both organizational efficiency and the risks associated with unpredictable, machine-driven decision-making.

The drive towards digital automation is often fueled by an image of administrative work as monotonous and repetitive, ideal for automation. Public sector discourse on e-government amplifies this view, presenting digital technologies as tools to achieve political and administrative efficiency. This narrative suggests that digital automation will not only streamline work processes but will also liberate workers from dull tasks—although the exact nature of this "freedom" remains ambiguous. Digital automation, then, becomes both a future-oriented strategy for enhancing organizational productivity and a justification for reshaping the labor landscape. At the core of these changes are algorithms, which reconfigure the nature of work by automating tasks and making decisions traditionally performed by humans. Shoshana Zuboff's concept of "surveillance capitalism" highlights how algorithmic automation has expanded exploitation by creating new forms of digital products based on behavioral data, with companies like Alphabet and Meta transforming online interactions into commodified "behavioral futures." This process relies on powerful automation systems that track, analyze, and predict user behavior, integrating these insights into business models that capitalize on users' digital footprints. The automation of administrative work also involves hidden layers of human labor that contribute to the training and upkeep of these systems. As algorithms increasingly manage complex processes, they require vast datasets, often assembled and refined by workers in precarious conditions who train algorithms for tasks like content moderation on social media platforms. This hidden labor illustrates that while the outcome appears automated, human input remains a foundational, if concealed, aspect of these systems. Moreover, algorithms can embed and even amplify societal biases, as they are trained on historical data that reflects existing inequalities. For example, Virginia Eubanks and Safiya Noble have shown how automated systems and search engines perpetuate biases against marginalized groups. By feeding on historical patterns, algorithms replicate these biases within faster, more efficient systems, potentially reinforcing discriminatory outcomes in contexts like criminal justice or hiring practices. As more aspects of daily interactions become automated, digital algorithms redefine power dynamics within both public and private organizations. Algorithms function as "boundary-making" entities, reshaping decision-making processes and potentially excluding certain groups from fair treatment. This shift is not merely technical; it reconfigures the political landscape of work by creating new forms of control and oversight, raising critical questions about who holds authority and whose values guide automated judgments in the workplace. If work is central to both individual and societal identity, the boundary-setting power of automation challenges the ability to exercise value-based judgment, transforming labor into a field increasingly governed by automated, often opaque decision-making (Andersson,

2023: 34-35). Digital Taylorism's aim to get maximum efficiency from employees by automating work processes can be considered to be related to life outside of work. This idea should be considered together with the concept of "reification", which discusses the spread of commodification to all areas.

Reification

Georg Lukács builds upon Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism by expanding it into a broader social context. While Marx examines commodity fetishism within the framework of economic production relations, Lukács goes further by questioning how commodity exchange influences not only economic aspects but also the social and individual lives within modern societies. According to Lukács, the commodity structure permeates society, reshaping it in its own image, becoming a generalized social category. In his reading of *Capital*, Lukács places Marx's theme of alienation at the center and integrates Weber's concept of instrumental rationality into Marx's analysis of the labor process. Thus, commodification (Marx) and instrumental rationality (Weber) achieve a harsh synthesis within the scientific management models that emerged in the early 20th-century United States. For Lukács, the rationalization of the work process fragments the labor process and laborers themselves, alienating them in ways unprecedented in Marx's time. In the period known as Fordism, dominated by mass production techniques, "the fate of the worker becomes the fate of society." This fate corresponds to what Lukács terms absolute reification—a process that colonizes not only material labor but also mental labor, fragmenting workers' cognitive functions and alienating their intellectual activities. With Taylorism, this division of labor impacts not only manual work but also intellectual work, as it objectifies mental labor. Lukács uses the example of the modern journalist to illustrate absolute reification; the journalist's writings are not expressions of their own thoughts but rather reflections of the newspaper's stance. Expected to suppress personal beliefs and maintain objectivity, the journalist's work loses any trace of individual conviction. This reification of thought becomes evident through the increased focus on technical matters and the rise of specialization. Taylorism embodies the dominance of means-oriented rationality over ends-oriented reasoning, as identified by Weber. One of Lukács's sharpest insights is that these developments ultimately erode individuals' ability to grasp life or the world as an integrated whole (Scannell, 2020: 55-56). From Lukács's perspective, the very reason bourgeois society is able to perpetuate itself so effectively is its capacity to transform everything—material objects, labor, even time—into interchangeable, isolated, and calculable commodities. In this context, individuals are alienated not only from themselves but also from the objects they produce. Yet, Lukács contends that the proletariat is uniquely positioned to overcome this alienation, as it alone is capable of attaining a consciousness of commodification—what he calls "reification"—and thus possesses the potential to transcend it (May, 2000: 17).

Jameson's theory of reification, strongly supported by Max Weber's analysis of rationalization, describes how capitalism restructures and "Taylorizes" traditional forms of human activity, analytically breaking them down and reconstructing them according to various models of rational efficiency. This process fundamentally reorganizes activities along a division between means and ends (Jameson, 2018: 251). Within the commodity world of capitalism, objects lose their independent existence and intrinsic qualities, becoming mere instruments for the satisfaction of commodity desires. Tourism, for example, serves as a familiar illustration: the American tourist, rather than allowing a landscape "to be in its own being," as Heidegger might put it, instead transforms the view into a fleeting photograph, thereby converting space into its own material image (Jameson, 2018: 253). This universal commodification of the object world gives rise to familiar explanations for conspicuous consumption and the sexualization of our objects and activities: a new car, for instance, functions primarily as an image for others, and we end up consuming not the thing itself, but the abstract idea of it, skillfully shaped by advertising to attract our libidinal investment (Jameson, 2018: 254). Essential commodification can be observed throughout the subgenres of contemporary commercial art, where the reification of a particular section or region of the artwork causes the rest to lose its value, reduced merely to the status of means in the pursuit of a specific purpose or consumptive satisfaction (Jameson, 2018: 255).

Lukács, in "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," begins by examining the transformative power of commodification in capitalist societies, where relationships between individuals are reduced to objectified relations among commodities. In this process, human relations gain an autonomy that disguises their true nature, appearing rational and independent while concealing the underlying social relations (Lukács, 2017: 3-4). He argues that reification is a defining characteristic of modern capitalism, extending beyond economics to encompass social and cultural dimensions. Through the division of labor, capitalism abstracts labor power from individual personality, transforming labor into an objectified commodity that can be sold on the market (Lukács, 2017: 5-6). Lukács further explores the traces of commodification within the bourgeois legal system, which operates through standardized formulas that disregard the personal and social qualities of individuals. This process renders the individual an abstract entity before the law, which in turn functions as a mechanism serving capitalist interests (Lukács, 2017: 10-11). Similarly, modern bureaucratic functions mirror this pattern, standardizing human interactions to create depersonalized, objectified structures (Lukács, 2017: 12-13). The rationalization inherent in scientific and technical advancements in society also contributes to the passivity of individuals in the production process. Lukács argues that modern capitalism compels individuals to become passive observers of their own objectified abilities, especially workers who, within the capitalist production process, function merely as parts of a machine to which they must conform (Lukács, 2017: 15-16). Finally, Lukács contends that these processes have the potential to foster class consciousness among the proletariat. By understanding the effects of commodification and objectification on the individual, the proletariat is able to critique capitalism and strive toward self-liberation (Lukács, 2017: 24-25).

According to Jürgen Habermas, the public sphere is a distinct realm that emerges from within civil society. While the private sphere is typically associated with the individual's domestic space, the public sphere initially consisted of private individuals who, despite its initially exclusive nature, gradually came together in salons and coffeehouses to engage in debate and seek influence over the market (Tokgöz, 2020: 164). Building on this foundation, Fuchs (2023) further conceptualizes the public sphere as a dynamic communicative space that mediates between the economic, political, cultural, and private domains of society. In this view, the public sphere functions as a universally accessible arena for the circulation of information, opinions, and collective debate on matters of shared concern. Its openness ensures that participation is not confined to any group; instead, speakers, audiences, and mediating actors such as journalists and mass media interact to facilitate broad-based engagement. The vitality of the public sphere depends on the free flow of ideas and the continual presence of critical discourse, as the suppression of dissent undermines its very existence. Moreover, Fuchs highlights that the public sphere is organized across multiple levels—from intimate, face-to-face exchanges in cafés and salons to large-scale, society-wide debates mediated by digital and mass media—thus serving as a communicative interface that enables diverse social actors to deliberate, contest, and influence public life (Fuchs, 2023: 272–275). With reification, we can speak of a context in which the public sphere has also disappeared. Because the permeation of the logic of commodification into every area of life also undermines the idea of a common good. Thus, the post-public sphere comes to the agenda.

The term "post-public sphere" refers to a transitional phase in political communication and societal engagement, marked by a move away from traditional, mass media-centered public discourse toward a more fragmented and volatile communicative landscape shaped by digital technologies. Philip Schlesinger articulates this concept as an era following the conventional, nationally bounded public spheres, characterized by the dominance of social media and platform-based communication, which creates fragmented and polarized public arenas (Schlesinger, 2020: 1545-1563). In the post-public sphere, traditional media and public institutions lose centrality, giving way to a "hybrid media system" that reflects and amplifies ideological divides, especially with the rise of populism and 'post-truth' discourse (Schlesinger, 2020: 1548-1551). In contrast to the classical public sphere, which Habermas viewed as a space for rational-critical debate and collective decision-making, the post-public sphere reflects contemporary challenges: the dominance of online platforms, regulatory struggles, and global geopolitical shifts, each influencing how public opinion is shaped and expressed. This environment is marked by "regulatory turns" as governments attempt to control or influence digital platforms, adding to the unpredictability and contested nature of public discourse in this fragmented digital space (Schlesinger, 2020: 1557-1559).

The relationship between reification and the post-public sphere can be understood by recognizing reification as the pervasive commodification of all areas of life. Reification, as developed by Marx and elaborated by Lukács, refers to the transformation of social relations into relations between objects, where commodities acquire an autonomous character, seemingly detached from the people who create them. This process not only shapes the economic structure of capitalist society but also profoundly impacts individuals' consciousness and social relations. Reification thus extends to the public sphere, where social interactions, debates, and public engagement increasingly become commodified under the influence of market forces. The post-public sphere, on the other hand, describes a context in which the traditional public sphere—once seen as a space for rational-critical debate—has dissolved, giving way to fragmented, ideologically polarized interactions mediated through social media and other digital platforms. In this environment, the structural cohesion that once supported the public sphere has eroded, as communication becomes more dispersed and less bound to conventional norms of public discourse. This fragmentation has fundamentally altered public dialogue, as communication is increasingly driven by personalized and commercial interests. The connection between reification and the post-public sphere lies in how commodification impacts public space, transforming it into an extension of commercial and private interests. Reification contributes to the commodification of the public sphere itself, as platforms that host public discussion are driven by profit motives, monetizing user engagement and data. Consequently, what was once a domain of open public interaction now functions as part of an economic model focused on data commodification and content trade. This shift marks the public sphere's transition into a commercialized environment where access and engagement are shaped by market dynamics rather than by ideals of democratic participation. It can be seen that reification progresses together with digitalization, including the public sphere. Reification is a logic that colonizes every area of life. Thus, "digital colonialism" comes to the forefront, bringing the discussions of digital space and colonialism to the forefront.

Digital Colonialism

Digital colonialism mirrors traditional colonialism in that it involves the appropriation of resources and the exploitation of labor, often enforced through significant political and economic power rather than direct military force. Just as colonial powers once seized land and forced indigenous populations into labor, digital colonialism reflects a similar dispossession by monopolizing the digital ecosystem. Companies from technologically advanced nations, primarily headquartered in developed countries, dominate digital services, exercising power over less developed regions by controlling internet traffic, setting digital policies, and creating dependencies that reinforce global inequalities. The essence of digital colonialism lies in the semi-imperial imposition of rules, designs, languages, and cultural values upon vast populations without their explicit consent. This dominance is evident in the prevalence of Western technology firms—especially those from the United States—in critical areas such as messaging, social media, search engines, cloud storage, and domain hosting. Dominating the digital infrastructure enables these firms to export the cultural and ideological values of regions like Silicon Valley worldwide,

establishing norms and reinforcing neoliberal governance, often laden with racial and patriarchal biases. This influence extends to the very core of digital practices, including the regulation of online behavior through coded norms, making these companies increasingly powerful in shaping global digital interaction (Yılmaz, 2024: 186)

Digital technology companies operate as natural monopolies, with giants like Google possessing the economic clout to acquire potential competitors, thereby perpetuating an oligopolistic market structure. Such dominance manifests through control over the three pillars of the digital ecosystem: software, hardware, and network connectivity. This monopolistic grip grants immense political, economic, and social leverage to tech corporations, further embedding developed countries' influence in the infrastructure of the internet. Digital colonialism also brings to light the systemic inequalities between individuals, nations, and regions within the digital realm. Ownership and control structures remain predominantly with developed nations, who also shape the regulatory environments and spearhead investments in education, infrastructure, and research and development. The high cost of digital products exemplifies this inequality, contributing to exclusionary practices that limit access for those in less affluent areas. English's dominance as the digital lingua franca further perpetuates this imbalance, cementing cultural hegemony within the digital sphere (Yılmaz, 2024: 187)

In this landscape, users in developing countries are subject to the norms and rules established by tech corporations from the United States. Social networks and platforms enforce content regulations, censor information, and manipulate newsfeeds, often imposing Silicon Valley's regional ideologies on a global scale. This monopolistic influence results in a form of extraterritorial governance, as users outside the United States increasingly fall under the quasi-imperial authority of these tech companies. The economic model of digital colonialism also drives exploitation in labor markets, as evidenced by the low-paid freelance workers in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa, who provide services to companies headquartered in wealthier nations. These workers function as an inexpensive labor source, fueling the capital accumulation of firms in developed countries while deepening dependency. Consequently, digital colonialism reinforces a contemporary center-periphery relationship, replicating colonial dependencies by embedding peripheral economies within the digital infrastructures controlled by core countries. Ultimately, digital colonialism highlights the persistence of colonial structures, albeit transformed and distributed across the digital landscape. Through this model, colonialism persists, manifesting as a networked form of dependency where technology and digital services replace the historical plantation economy (Yılmaz, 2024: 188)

Digital colonialism represents a modern, decentralized form of resource extraction and control, paralleling traditional colonial practices in the digital sphere. In this framework, Western tech companies establish, own, and operate communication networks in underdeveloped regions, enabling them to collect data from users—often without explicit consent—on a massive scale. The structure of digital colonialism relies on four primary actors: the tech companies that provide the infrastructure and data harvesting capabilities, advertising and consulting firms that use this infrastructure to disseminate targeted content, local entities that leverage this system to promote agendas within specific regions, and the individuals who unknowingly serve as data sources and targets. Much like historical colonialism, digital colonialism operates on a logic of dispossession, with corporations in the Global North—often U.S.-based—installing connectivity infrastructure designed to serve their own economic interests in the Global South. This infrastructure grants these companies significant power over data flow, social activities, and even cultural narratives, while allowing them to monetize these interactions through rents and data surveillance. Data, akin to traditional resources, is increasingly considered a form of currency. Access to this data grants companies and states influence and control over individual behavior, which they use to enhance targeted advertising and exert political power. Through extensive data collection methods, such as online behavioral tracking, companies develop highly personalized user profiles, which are sold to advertisers, political groups, or retained for future predictive use. The scope of data gathered includes personal identifiers, browsing habits, location, and even inferred attributes like political preferences, relationships, and emotional states, creating unprecedented insights into user behavior. With vast populations in Africa and other developing regions coming online, Western tech companies view these areas as valuable, untapped markets. Using projects like Facebook's Free Basics and Google's Project Loon, these firms present themselves as bridging the digital divide, while their actual aim is to capture user data and drive new ad revenue. This approach is reminiscent of historical colonial infrastructure projects, such as railroads, which served colonial interests rather than fostering local economic growth (Coleman, 2018: 422-425).

The concept of digital colonialism illustrates the intricate web of global data control, mirroring older forms of colonialism through the domination of digital infrastructure and resources. Similar to traditional colonial powers, major technology corporations—primarily from developed countries—wield significant influence over developing regions by embedding communication networks and capturing user data without the explicit consent of the populace. This form of control involves a complex network of actors, from tech giants to advertisers, who collectively benefit from the commodification of user data while shaping the digital ecosystem to serve their business interests. This structure resembles past colonial methods, wherein economically stronger entities-maintained power by monopolizing critical resources and determining the rules of engagement. Today, corporations like Facebook and Google achieve similar dominance by creating a dependency on their digital services. By controlling software, infrastructure, and even the internet access hardware in some cases, they not only capture and monetize vast amounts of data but also hold substantial sway over the political and social realms of less developed regions. These tech firms' "philanthropic" initiatives to bridge the digital divide often mask the true agenda of data extraction and digital dominance, with developing countries serving as relatively easy ground for control due

to a lack of regulatory frameworks, privacy protections, and economic leverage. Furthermore, the increasing use of artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies amplifies this power disparity. By analyzing extensive datasets, companies can predict and influence user behavior to an unprecedented extent, positioning themselves as gatekeepers of critical digital spaces. Developing nations, meanwhile, face the risks of heightened surveillance and curtailed autonomy in the digital realm, as their citizens' data becomes a commodity traded for corporate gain. The essential technological infrastructure remains concentrated in a few wealthy countries, making it challenging for less developed regions to assert digital sovereignty or pursue alternative paths free from foreign influence. This dynamic reflects a form of modern colonialism where digital tools replace traditional methods of control, yet the outcome remains similar: dependency, economic exploitation, and restricted agency for those outside the centers of technological power. As such, digital colonialism signifies a reshaping of global power, situating technology companies as influential, quasi-imperial actors with far-reaching implications for privacy, democracy, and sovereignty in the digital age (Avila Pinto, 2018: 16-20).

Discussion

Digital colonialism and racialization intersect to show how contemporary digital technologies perpetuate the dynamics of racial and colonial capitalism. While data monetization may appear new, its foundational logic—the commodification of human life and the establishment of racialized governance—mirrors historical practices of colonial exploitation. By situating our understanding of capitalism within colonial enterprises like the slave plantation, rather than just within Western industrial centers, it becomes clear that digital technologies reproduce similar patterns, reshaping and reinforcing a racialized world order. The mechanisms of data capitalism echo the racial hierarchies embedded within historical colonial practices, transforming aspects of human life into data for corporate profit, often without individual consent. This modern extraction process resembles colonial resource exploitation, revealing how racialized and colonial logics continue within data economies.

In the global data economy, digital platforms frequently rely on labor extraction from developing regions, extending colonial practices that established exploitative conditions. Analyses often focus on outsourced labor but may overlook how colonialism initially set up these dynamics. Digital technologies do not merely replicate national racial hierarchies but also create and exploit neocolonial spaces, such as in humanitarian zones, border surveillance, and conflict areas. These exceptional spaces function similarly to colonial frontiers, where governance operates differently, often outside standard regulatory or ethical frameworks, reinforcing racial hierarchies and maintaining asymmetrical power relations. Furthermore, the composition of digital products is inherently global, reflecting colonial and neocolonial routes of material and labor extraction. These products are assembled from resources and labor sourced through exploitative conditions, maintaining colonial power relations. Analyzing the hidden exploitation within digital supply chains reveals how these technologies uphold and modernize colonial power structures in a globalized digital economy (Hammer & Park, 2021: 225-226).

The relationship between Digital Taylorism and digital colonialism reveals how exploitation and precarity are reconfigured and globally expanded in the digital sphere. These two concepts are critical to understanding how power dynamics in the digital age reshape labor processes. Digital Taylorism modernizes traditional Taylorist work management through digital technologies, enabling constant surveillance, control, and optimization of work processes via algorithms and data-driven management tools. This model intensifies exploitation by monitoring every move of the worker to maximize productivity, binding workers to a flexible yet intensified regime of control. For instance, platforms like Uber and Amazon monitor workers meticulously, using algorithms to evaluate their performance and dictate even the smallest details of their tasks.

Digital colonialism, on the other hand, describes the strategy of dominant technology corporations from developed countries imposing digital infrastructure and platforms on the Global South, effectively controlling the digital economy. Through this framework, digital colonialism not only exploits local workers but also shapes their work practices, culture, and identity according to the norms set by Western platforms. In regions such as Africa, Latin America, and Asia, digital workers are often forced to work for Western platforms due to limited local opportunities and are subjected to low wages and foreign cultural expectations. The commonality between Digital Taylorism and digital colonialism is the "reification" of the digital labor class. Reification, a concept developed by Marx and expanded by Lukács, refers to the process by which human relationships and labor are reduced to objects or data points. Digital Taylorism positions workers as "data sources" monitored and evaluated through algorithms, making every aspect of their work—from hours to productivity metrics—a form of data subject to analysis. This process alienates workers from their labor, as they lose control over their work experience. Digital colonialism extends this alienation on a global scale, as Western platforms establish a digital infrastructure that compels local workers to conform to imposed norms and practices.

The connection between these two concepts lies in the intensified reification and alienation of digital laborers, who are constantly surveilled and required to adapt to Western standards. Reification accelerates workers' detachment from the labor process, as their work becomes an impersonal, data-driven activity. In the digital colonial framework, workers in developing regions are not only subjected to Western norms but also to precarious labor conditions driven by global platforms' economic interests. Together, Digital Taylorism and digital colonialism reinforce and deepen the processes of precariousness, alienation, and reification of digital labor. In the digital economy, labor exploitation and power asymmetry are perpetuated through Digital Taylorist practices that make control more invisible yet more intense. Workers are reduced to mere data sources and cheap labor within a system where their autonomy is curtailed by a transnational digital capitalist structure.

In the context of Digital Taylorism and digital colonialism, the "submission of all areas of life to the logic of commodification" becomes increasingly pronounced. As digital capitalism expands its reach, it seeks to turn every interaction, behavior, and even identity into a commodity. Digital Taylorism exemplifies this through the commodification of labor, where workers' actions, productivity, and performance are broken down into data points, transforming labor into a quantifiable resource that can be managed, optimized, and controlled. This reduction of labor to data eliminates personal agency and transforms workers into mere components of a data-driven economy. Digital colonialism extends this commodification beyond labor by imposing Western platforms and technologies on the Global South, pushing societies to adopt digital infrastructures that primarily serve the interests of dominant corporations. In this process, not only labor but also local cultures, social interactions, and personal data become commodified assets. Through digital platforms, social media interactions, personal preferences, and even cultural symbols are harvested, monitored, and repurposed for profit, reinforcing economic dependencies and homogenizing cultural expressions to align with global market demands.

Together, Digital Taylorism and digital colonialism illustrate how commodification infiltrates all dimensions of life. From labor processes to social relationships, digital capitalism seeks to convert human experience into a source of profit. This leads to a deepening of alienation, as individuals increasingly find their lives mediated by technologies that turn their identities, choices, and relationships into monetizable entities. The pervasive logic of commodification transforms human existence, reducing it to a transactional relationship with digital platforms, stripping away the intrinsic value of individual and cultural identities in favor of market-driven metrics and economic utility. Ultimately, the submission of life to the commodification logic in digital capitalism underscores the need for critical examination and resistance. Without intervention, this trend risks eroding autonomy and agency, reinforcing existing inequalities, and establishing a global digital order in which every aspect of human life is merely a resource for corporate profit.

Conclusion

The intertwining of Digital Taylorism and digital colonialism marks a paradigmatic shift in the contemporary global organization of labor, power, and subjectivity. These mechanisms, rooted in algorithmic management and global platform monopolies, have not only intensified the commodification of labor but have also reshaped the very contours of social and public life. Workers, increasingly managed by opaque algorithmic systems and subject to relentless surveillance, are systematically alienated from their labor, agency, and even their sense of collective belonging. At the same time, digital colonialism amplifies historical patterns of dependency, as technological infrastructures and cultural standards imposed by corporations from the Global North reproduce global inequalities and perpetuate the subordination of the Global South within digital capitalism.

The consequences of these intertwined dynamics are profound. The reduction of labor, social interaction, and even cultural expression to data points for extraction and monetization erodes both autonomy and diversity, fostering a climate of intensified alienation and precariousness. The dominance of digital platforms, combined with the global reach of algorithmic control, threatens not only the economic agency of individuals but also the foundations of democratic participation and public good. The "post-public sphere" that emerges from this transformation is marked by fragmentation, commercialization, and ideological polarization, as digital platforms monopolize discourse and undermine the possibility for collective democratic engagement.

In response to these challenges, there is an urgent need for a shift from mere critique to proactive, solution-oriented strategies. First, regulatory frameworks must be established at both national and international levels to ensure transparency and accountability in algorithmic management. This includes mandating explainability for algorithmic decisions, establishing rights to algorithmic due process for workers, and creating independent oversight bodies to audit and regulate algorithmic systems. Second, labor protections must be updated to reflect the realities of digital work. This means extending labor rights, social protections, and collective bargaining mechanisms to platform workers, freelancers, and those engaged in remote, gig, or otherwise digitally mediated forms of labor. Collective organizing and unionization efforts must be supported and adapted to the transnational and digitally mediated character of contemporary work. Third, the principle of data sovereignty should be upheld, granting individuals and communities genuine control over their data, with explicit consent mechanisms, robust privacy protections, and the right to benefit from the value generated by their digital labor. Fourth, policy interventions should prioritize the development of public digital infrastructures, such as non-profit digital platforms, open-source tools, and publicly funded digital commons, to foster democratic participation and cultural diversity free from the logics of market-driven commodification.

Academia, civil society, and policymakers must collaborate to ensure critical digital literacy, empowering individuals and communities to understand, contest, and reshape the systems that govern their lives. This also calls for more inclusive and participatory research that centers the experiences and agency of marginalized digital laborers, especially in the Global South. Ultimately, only through a combination of democratic regulation, labor empowerment, data justice, and public digital infrastructure can the alienating and exploitative tendencies of digital capitalism be meaningfully challenged. Such an agenda is not only necessary to reclaim autonomy and cultural integrity but is also essential for the revitalization of democracy and the realization of digital spaces as genuinely public goods in the twenty-first century.

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