INTERCULTURAL INFORMATION ETHICS APPLIED TO THE DATA COLONIALISM CONCEPT

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Abstract: There is a universalized and socially accepted view of order and totality focused on the processing of personal data, categorizing subjects and configuring criticism in a European view that sustains the dynamics of modernity, giving rise to what is called Data Colonialism. This paper explores the relationship between Data Colonialism and Intercultural Information Ethics - IIE, focusing on whether these concepts are connected. The study argued that just as industrial capitalism transformed society by commodifying labor, data capitalism is changing society by commodifying human life through collecting, controlling, and exploiting personal data. This practice contributes to class division and digital colonialism, where digital territories become sites of extraction and exploitation. Data Colonialism and IIE both address issues of informational justice in diverse cultural contexts. IIE can provide insights into analyzing these relationships from the perspective of local cultures on privacy, informed consent, and information sharing, which differ greatly between different cultures. IIE understand and respect different cultural perspectives on information, while Data Colonialism refers to companies and governments exploiting personal data without consent and reproducing colonial power relations. An intercultural ethical approach to information can help analyze the effects of data colonialism and promote justice and equity in different cultural contexts. By recognizing these colonization processes in the digital age, in which there are ethical implications in relation to the transit of information and cultural differences, we propose to think about this complex network from the Intercultural Ethics of Information.

INTRODUCTION

An exponential change is happening in society from the exploitation of data. This is a common statement, whether in the uncritical literature that maps business trends (Davenport, 2014; Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013) or in more critical arguments that see Big Data processing as the means for a new stage of capitalism (Cohen, 2018; Dean, 2005; Fuchs & Mosco, 2015; Srnicek, 2017; West, 2019; Zuboff, 2015).

The richest companies in the world in 2022[1] are built on data capital. In 2018 the data broker industry was estimated to generate $200 billion in annual revenue (Crain, 2018). Many of these companies use the data created by people using technology tools. For Scholz (2012), the accumulation of these companies comes from the "digital work" done by people who receive little or nothing in return. Thatcher et al. (2016, p. 994) argue that these extractive practices come to "[…] mirror processes of primitive accumulation or accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2003, 2004) that occur as capitalism colonizes previously noncommodified, private times and places". Sadowski (2019) corroborates that this level of exploration and inequality indicates extraction.

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[1] World Top 1000 Companies List and World Ranks as on January 7th, 2022. Value Today. 2022. Disponível em: https://web.archive.org/web/20220317104150/https://www.value.today/. Acesso em: 17 mar. 2022.

Sadowski (2019, p. 01) argues that "data – and the accumulation of data – is a core component of political economy in the 21st century", establishing a parallel between data and capital in contemporary capitalism. Considering that datafication within capitalism is a process of abstracting and extracting data in various spaces to generate profit, Thatcher et al. (2016) argue that there is a geography and a politics of datafication and, with this, establish a connection with historical colonialism, characterized by inequality in economic, cultural and territorial relations between states and empires based on domination and subordination. This process of establishing a data value chain is called "digital colonialism" (Kwet, 2019; Mann & Daly, 2019; Stingl, 2015; Young, 2019) or "data colonialism" (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Mumford, 2021; Thatcher et al., 2016).

Datafication carries ethical implications, especially from increased surveillance and advances in artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. And therefore, the debate on the ethical issues surrounding these concepts must be carried out from an intercultural perspective, especially since these discussions are often dominated by Western values and interests. In this sense, based on the assumption that "a purely metacultural information ethics remains abstract if it is not interculturally reflected" (Capurro, 2008a), this study departs from the perspective of Intercultural Information Ethics – EII (Capurro, 2005, 2008a, 2008b) to discuss the concept of Data Colonialism.

Analyzing colonialism exclusively from a Western perspective leads to an imbalance and the risk that studies on the subject will help to reproduce a discourse with ethical damage, colliding with the views of the communities in which the colonial process of data falls. Although the concepts of Information Ethics are valid and considered in these debates, we rely on Gautam & Singh (2021), as we understand that it is essential to consider that the diverse and pluralistic nature of societies imposes a requirement on us to analyze the ethics of information centered on the other, sensitive to the context, without being homogenizing, paternalistic and colonizing: the Intercultural Information Ethics. Hongladarom (2016) says that the fundamental core of the field reflects how the values presumably belonging to the field of information ethics should be understood in light of the spread of information technologies to all cultures in the world.

This paper aims to examine the relationship between the concept of Data Colonialism from the perspective of Intercultural Information Ethics. This is exploratory-descriptive research, supported by bibliographical research, especially in Capurro's work on Intercultural Information Ethics and the concept of Data Colonialism, by Couldry & Mejias (2019). An approximation of this approach is made with the proposal of neocolonialism that starts from Marxist thought when it evokes the relations between foreign motivations and capitalism.

The following section explores the conceptual bias of colonialism and platforms as a means to operationalize colonization from data. This presentation leads to decolonial thinking applied to data colonialism and digital neocolonialism. From this point, we understand that the fundamental basis on which data colonialism is based is datafication. This transformation of life into data takes place in digital territories that have the propensity of becoming spaces of extraction and exploitation, therefore, places of digital colonialism. It proposes to think about the concepts of colonization in the digital age and their ethical implications in cultural differences associated with the perspective of intercultural information ethics.

2   DIGITAL PLATFORMS AS THE MEANS OF DATA COLONIALISM

Despite an eventual lack of theoretical clarity of data colonialism, as well as its difference in relation to digital colonialism, both are the result of "[…] a new social order, based on continuous tracking, and offering unprecedented new opportunities for social discrimination and behavioral influence (Couldry & Mejias, 2019, p. 336). This assertion is best understood through the history of colonialism established by creating and maintaining unequal economic, cultural, and territorial relations between states and empires based on domination and subordination (Segell, 2019). Moore (2015) says that historical capitalism depended on the availability of cheap nature: natural resources that are abundant, easy to appropriate from their rightful owners, and whose depletion is seen as unproblematic, but whose "availability for capital" had to be built up by through elaborate means of commodification.

In this line of thought, data extraction enacts a new form of colonialism, normalizing the exploitation of human beings through data, just as historical colonialism appropriated territories and resources and governed subjects for profit (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). This colonialism provides the preconditions for a new stage of capitalism in which the appropriation of human life through data will be central, in the same way, that historical colonialism provided the preconditions for the emergence of industrial capitalism (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). Just as industrial capitalism would not have happened without the prior appropriation of vast territories, their "natural" resources, and bodies from the perspective of historical colonialism, we are currently witnessing the first stage of a long-term development: the colonial appropriation of life in general and its annexation to capital through the digital platform. In short, the data colonialism thesis foreshadows the continued extraction of economic value from human life through data.

The platform produces the social for capital (Couldry & Mejias, 2019), concentrates information about the "social" and becomes a space where data is "ready" to be appropriated and exploited to add value. This understanding is based on the assumption that personal data is a natural resource freely available for exploitation. Julie Cohen (2018) points out that the fiction that lands inhabited millennia ago (such as the territory now known as Australia) was terra nullius or "no man's land" and therefore available for exploitation without legal interference has strong parallels at the moment. From this perception, extractive activities become naturalized, and the flow of everyday life begins to be reconfigured and represented in a way that allows its capture as data. This phenomenon was called life mining by Mayer-schöenberger e Cukier (2013).

The apparent naturalness of data appropriations considers the cliché that data is "the new oil" lost by humanity, so corporations appropriate it for some purpose. This is based on constructing data as a "raw material" with natural value, as the World Economic Forum (WEF) states: "personal data will be the new 'oil' – a valuable resource of the 21st century […] becoming a new type of raw material that's on par with capital and labour" (WEF, 2011, p. 5,7). Through this discursive movement, data exploration – its appropriation – is obfuscated.

This understanding is achieved through the common and simplistic idea that data is merely the exhaustion exhaled by people's lives and, therefore, could not be owned by anyone. This would position society as a natural beneficiary of corporations' extractive efforts, just as humanity should benefit from historical colonialism as a "civilizational" project (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). It is assumed, therefore, that data colonialism is an ideological work, just as historical colonialism was.

In this context, datafication is understood as a colonial process, not just in the metaphorical sense of saying that "data is the new oil", but literally as a new mode of colonialism that appropriates human life so that data can be continuously extracted and used for the benefit and interests of some. Instead of territories, natural resources, and slave labor, data colonialism appropriates social resources (Terranova, 2000).

The colonial relationship – between colonizer and colonized – in this age of data takes place through the Terms of Service and Privacy Policies of digital platforms. These documents establish the legal precepts to which platform users will be subject if they agree to use the digital service. In these terms, the conditions of use and the personal data that will be collected are mentioned. However, they are extensive and dense documents, making them "pro forma" without real reading conditions. To make an analogy to the period of historical colonization, we turn to Bartolomé de las Casas (1951, 58[2]

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[2] de las Casas, Bartolomé. 1951. História de Las Indias [History of the Indies]. vol. 3. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Economica.

apud Couldry and Mejias, 2019), who narrated for the first time the case of the "Spanish empire's Requerimiento". The requirement, read in Spanish by the colonizers to a non-Spanish speaking audience, aimed to present the natives with the new order under which they would now have to subordinate themselves and demanded their simple acceptance or, in case of denial, the extermination.

Saved proportions, both cases depended on unilateral force: the Requirement depended on an effective monopoly of physical force; the strength of data colonialism lies in the forms of economic concentration, one of which is the digital platform (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). Whatever the force used, it is through the discursive act accompanying it that it inserts the subjects inevitably in the relations of colonization. And therefore, we reaffirm that digital platforms are the technological means that produce a new type of "social" for capital: that is, the social is translated in a way that can be continuously tracked, captured, classified, and accounted for as value.

In surveillance studies, it is common to assert that the asymmetric accumulation of data dispossesses management subjects of their own personal information, providing opportunities for data collection practices (Cinnamon, 2017; Lyon, 2005, 2007). Most seem to agree that, barring some form of intervention, surveillance capitalism, data colonialism, and all their peripheral strains will continue exacerbating trends in increasing social and wealth inequality (Aho & Duffield, 2020). And with that, it is realized that analyses of data colonialism are meaningful, useful, and worthy of critical discussion as society realizes how new technologies shape global developments (Costa & Melo, 2022).

Before the information explosion experienced with the insertion of the Internet, the data sources on social life were limited to company customer records, responses to direct marketing, data from credit bureaus, and public government records (Schneier, 2015). These are documents with high informational content on which we can reconstruct the history of a particular person, event, situation, and context. However, this did not create a way to generate economic value, as is currently the case. It is not, therefore, a question of accumulating, processing, using, and reusing personal data but of using this information without the proper authorization of the holders for commercial purposes and monetary and symbolic invoicing. The extractive action of data is just like the action of extermination of native peoples in the period of historical colonization: there is no return, but one can think of it in a "decolonial" way.

3   DECOLONIAL THINKING APPLIED TO DIGITAL NEOCOLONIALISM

Quijano (2007) says that it is not just about going beyond the colonial through the "post-colonial" but challenging the legitimacy of colonialism through "decolonial" ways of thinking. We understand that colonialism refers to the bond of social, political, and cultural domination that colonizers exercise over the countries and peoples they conquered around the world. On the other hand, coloniality concerns the understanding of the permanence of the colonial power structure until the present day, even centuries after the end of the colonies and their independence processes (Quijano, 2007).

The concept was developed within the scope of historical colonialism, but its reflection also brings possibilities to approach data colonialism. Decolonial thinking helps us understand that colonialism – be it historical or data – can only be fought if it is attacked at its core: the underlying rationality that allows continued appropriation to feel natural, necessary, and in some way an enhancement, not a one-off violence to human development (Quijano, 2007).

Quijano (2007) invokes an "epistemological decolonization" that paves the way for exchanging experiences and meanings that may claim some universality. The aim of epistemological decolonization is not to abandon rationality or even universality but the claim to absolute universality characteristic of European modernity, reproduced in data colonialism from the logic of universally extracting data (Quijano, 2007). The author refers to Europe to suggest the model imposed in periods of historical colonialism. However, his argument remains even when the domination of technology and data is centered in the US and China, making current colonialism operate far beyond the limits of European traditions.

Escaping coloniality (that is, constructing decoloniality) means questioning, in the first place, European epistemology as the zero point on which modernity is based – a move that is apparently not the central purpose of data colonialism "[...] in order to foster a pluriverse of alternative knowledges" (Mumford, 2021, p. 1513). Mumford (2021), bringing a recent critical analysis of Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias (2019) work on data colonialism, says that its conceptual development shows the potential of establishing postcolonial and decolonial insights. However, the question is the extent to which decolonial issues motivate and ground the concept.

This criticism is based on the citations present in the article that coined the term, under which Mumford (2021) assumes that the authors seem to be more concerned with datafication as an extraction of resources and less concerned with the key decolonial vision of Europe that he is said to have a privileged position from which he can make universal assertions and claims. The references used to coin the term are centered on authors from the South American modernity/coloniality school. The theory says that data colonialism offers an overview of data mining, while legitimate and

important concerns are not fundamental decolonial concerns (Mumford, 2021). The concept of data colonialism, according to Mumford (2021, p. 1513), "[...] shies away from addressing front and centre Quijano's point about the origins of coloniality, that is, that Europe imagined itself at the objective centre and thereby legitimized conquest and destruction of other ways of knowing and being".

The decolonial theory provides us with tools to qualify the nature of power asymmetry and inequalities that arise from advanced technologies. One such resource may be identifying centers of power and their peripheries that hold relatively less power and contest central authority over participation and legitimacy in shaping everyday life. By identifying the actors in this colonization process, it also identifies the causes and consequences of this colonization.

The differences between the center of power and periphery are models that must be used cautiously to not reduce the reality of lived experiences to simplified binary factors such as "West and East". This oversimplification may expose one of the limitations of the decolonial theory.

Mouton and Burns (2021) bring a recent contribution regarding digital colonialism, arguing that the term "neocolonialism", different from colonialism, requires rethinking resistance tactics and strategies. In other words, the authors claim that resisting digital neocolonialism "[…] entails articulating and enacting a politics of resistance that differs from those we might espouse to resist its colonial counterpart" (Mouton & Burns, 2021, p. 1897).

Even though they have coined a new terminology, the authors argue that these tactics and strategies are complementary, mutually necessary, and not antagonistic. Just as colonialism and neocolonialism coexisted and still continue to coexist, the era of digital colonialism is not over either when the term digital neocolonialism is coined: It is still very much present "[…] but it is no longer the only phenomenon of digital imperialism that we need to consider" (Mouton & Burns, 2021, p. 1892). The difference between colonialism and neocolonialism is, in part, diachronic. Therefore, the distinction between digital colonialism and digital neocolonialism concerns chronology (Mouton & Burns, 2021).

Another exponential difference between colonialism and neocolonialism is the role of nation-states: as digital infrastructure is being instituted, nation-states step in and regulate the digital domain in a way similar to that of implicit ownership (Mouton & Burns, 2021). Contemporary examples of this assertion can be found in requests for state sovereignty in this area, such as the Data Protection Regulations, to laws that determine State control over data processing, such as the China Social Credit System (SCS).

China, by the way, is a current example of what is being called digital neocolonialism, given its state effort to become a "cybernetic superpower" (Cook, 2018). Part of this effort is the propagation

by Beijing of the notion of "internet sovereignty", which assumes China's supreme right to manage the internet within its borders and keep it under control (W. Gravett, 2020).

4   DIGITAL COLONIALISM FROM THE INTERCULTURAL INFORMATION ETHICS PERSPECTIVE

Information ethics is concerned with debating the creation, organization, dissemination, and use of information within the scope of ethical standards and moral codes (Floridi, 2008) and emerges as a specialized branch that could be applied not only to information packages or aggregates but to the entire cycle of information (Floridi, 2010). This concept is inserted with the idea of changing the focus from anthropocentric ethics to an information-centered paradigm, in which the focus is directed to information entities and the infosphere. Although the term was coined decades ago, there is still no universal consensus. However, the diverse and plural nature of societies imposed the need to present the concept of intercultural information ethics. An intercultural ethics that is centered and context-sensitive, and functional without being homogenizing, paternalistic, and colonizing (Gautam & Singh, 2021).

IIE is a subfield of information ethics that seeks to examine issues from different cultural and social perspectives. It includes the foundational works of Hongladarom (1999), Hongladarom e Ess (2006), Capurro (2005, 2008a), Ess (2006), among other notable scholars. Intercultural issues arising from information technologies have been addressed in conferences since the mid-1990s, such as the conference "Cultural attitudes towards technology and communication" (Capurro, 2008a) and "Information ethics: agents, artifacts, and Conference of New Cultural Perspectives" (Floridi & Savulescu, 2006). This strand is based on the assumption that without an intercultural inclination, the richness of tradition and human morality will be lost (Capurro, 2008b). Only through intercultural dialogue can the discourse of information ethics become comprehensive, other-centered, harmonious, and compassionate.

The IIE explores its questions based on comparative studies carried out either at a concrete and ontic level or at an ontological and structural level, in a bias that can be narrow or broad. In a narrow sense, the concept looks at how its issues are understood from different cultural traditions, especially under the impact of information and communication technology (ICT) in different cultures. In its broad sense, it deals with intercultural issues raised by other means of communication, not just the technological one, allowing a broader cultural vision.

These debates highlight privacy, online communities, governance, legislation, race and gender issues, telecommunications, medical care, digital literacy, social, educational, and monetary power

issues. For Michel Foucault (1983), ethics exists to problematize morality; therefore, the debate on the sources of morality needs to be deepened from an intercultural perspective. Therefore, the IIE has a critical task when comparing information moralities.

Globalization allows societies to access what was once closely related to a culture or a defined geographic space while also giving rise to questions about what matters locally. Communities begin to see themselves and perceive their needs, while cyberspace disappears in the diversity of complex connections, whether real or virtual, even though in today's society, we are formed through digitally mediated perceptions. The geographic and language limits to which societies were oriented now appear materialized by the limits of digital networks that permeate and accelerate relationships.

Charles Ess (2018) highlighted the concept of "computer-mediated colonization" when analyzing examples of the cultural conflicts that occur when information and communication technologies operate outside the cultural values of the global South. The author argues that the colonization processes introduced by those who lead the technological market must be fought through the use of culturally conscious approaches, either for the implementation of the project or the resistance to it.

As mentioned earlier, China is a current example of what is being called digital neocolonialism, given its state effort to become a "cyber superpower" (Cook, 2018). Part of this effort is the propagation by Beijing of the notion of "internet sovereignty"[3], which assumes China's supreme right to govern the internet within its borders and keep it under a regime of control (W. Gravett, 2020).

However, beyond its borders, the Chinese government has been working closely with Chinese technology companies to export products and services to Africa to expand China's influence and promote its model of cyberspace governance (W. Gravett, 2020), materializing what is called digital colonialism.

> If African governments fail to advance their own values and interests – including freedom of expression, free enterprise and the rule of law – with equal boldness, the 'China model' of digital governance by default might very well become the 'Africa model'. (W. Gravett, 2020, p. 125).

Perhaps the biggest concern is that the Chinese government has shifted its domestic digital technology policies into its foreign policy (Polyakova & Meserole, 2019). As part of President Xi Jinping's strategy to transform China into a "cyber superpower", the Chinese government and

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[3] The expression "internet sovereignty" first appeared in 2010, when the Chinese government published a white paper reaffirming the primacy of its right to govern the internet within its borders and keep it under the jurisdiction of Chinese sovereignty (Woodhams, 2019).

technology companies are working to export their technology and information control systems to nations around the world (Freedom House, 2019).

China's presence on the African continent has been steadily growing for 20 years. However, it began to increase exponentially in 2013 after President Xi Jinping unveiled the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an international power development strategy with an investment of trillions of dollars, which seeks to extend Beijing's influence in the countries that adhere, through bilateral loans and infrastructure projects (W. H. Gravett, 2022). Through this global infrastructure project, China disseminates its policy that defends the vision of a government-controlled internet worldwide, including in Africa (Mozur et al., 2019; Yuan, 2019), a continent that enthusiastically adhered to BRI (W. H. Gravett, 2022).

Chinese technological penetration in Africa raises the specter of digital colonialism due to the application of economic and political pressure by China through technology to control and influence the actions of African countries (W. Gravett, 2020). Chinese technology has become an attractive commodity due to the difficulty many countries have to develop and the low monetary costs involved in acquiring it (Romaniuk & Burgers, 2018). This is why many African countries, through the lure of easy loans and investments, have become dependent on China for their technology and services. The issue that deserves attention in this scenario is that the Chinese model of mass censorship, through its automated surveillance systems, leads to a dramatic reduction of digital freedom across the continent, threatening still emerging democracies (Shahbaz, 2018; Woodhams, 2019).

In this way, digital colonialism expresses itself through the observed influence on sociocultural structures, knowledge systems, approaches to the development and use of technology grounded in systems and institutions imported from colonizing cultures, as well as in historical values that persist and are accepted without question in the present, all supported by legal resources and forms of governance inherited from the colonial period.

In this scenario, enjoying a free and democratic political discourse, in which the legislation and regulation of telecommunications and the Internet must be transparent, accountable, and open to reform, comes from a decolonial discourse. However, these issues are almost absent from the public debate, which has devoted exponential efforts to the problems of algorithmic discrimination, fake news, and the need for regulation to moderate the power of Big Tech (Kwet, 2019). Privacy and antitrust regulations that keep the technical architecture intact will not rein in Big Tech nor sufficiently constrain its global reach (Kwet, 2019). And therefore, one agrees with Mumford (2021), who says that this presumption of white, patriarchal, European objectivity sustains the dynamics of modernity, including datafication, which should be the central target of decolonial strategies.

5   CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study analyzed the concept attributed to Data Colonialism from the perspective of Intercultural Information Ethics, seeking to understand if a relationship brings these two dimensions together. The analysis was based on scientific publications on the subject and debates that surround these concepts. The initial premise of this analysis assumes that information ethics can only be achieved if the complex interconnections, often not evident, between ethics, culture, information, technology, and different social classes within territorial borders are not ignored.

It is said that technologies are praised for their simplicity, clarity, and ability to promote unity between people. However, they also hide the unfavorable consequences of data mining, such as information asymmetries, unpaid work, social control, constant surveillance, invasion of privacy, relations of inequality, discrimination, extraction, and exploitation. These narratives highlight the rise of data capitalism and argue for the increasing influence of technology in the social environment. However, they also have the power to dismantle democracies and establish a "control force" through surveillance.

In the same way industrial capitalism altered society by transforming work into an abstract social form, data capitalism is changing society by converting human life into a new abstract social form becoming increasingly commodified: data. This capitalism contributes to class division, and, in this way, they constitute territories. In the case of data, these territories become digital, which, like physical spaces, tend to become places of extraction and exploitation and, consequently, places of digital colonialism.

Thus, there is a universalized and socially accepted perspective of order and totality concerning the processing of personal data, which classifies individuals and remodels society towards absolute algorithmic control. This can be observed in different spheres, as has been visibly happening in some countries on the African continent, where eastern technology companies collect user data without consent or benefit, reproducing colonial power relations. These relationships must be analyzed from the perspectives of the local culture on privacy, informed consent, and information sharing, which differ absolutely if African and Eastern cultures are compared, for example. And in this sense, the lessons of Intercultural Information Ethics can be applied.

And, therefore, the Colonialism of Data and the Intercultural Ethics of Information are related to the extent that both address informational justice in diverse cultural contexts. Intercultural Ethics is concerned with understanding and respecting different cultural perspectives concerning information,

while Data Colonialism refers to the practice of companies and governments collecting, controlling, and exploiting personal data without consent, reproducing colonial power relations.

In this sense, an intercultural ethical approach to information can help analyze data colonialism's effects, promoting justice and equity in different cultural contexts. Using technical and political strategies, one can contrast approaches that mobilize collective organizations towards anti-capitalist structural changes, making this colonization process through data more difficult. More broadly, creating communities of resistance can weaken the power of digital neocolonialism if this is ethically feasible for the analyzed cultural reality.

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