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Mejias, Ulises, A. & Couldry, Nick (2024). *Data Grab: The New Colonialism of Big Tech (and How to Fight Back)*. WH Allen, 333 pp., ISBN: 978-0-7535-6020-4

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There are books that inform, books that diagnose, and books that challenge us. But there are others —much rarer— that succeed in unlocking our understanding of the present to such a degree that they enable us to outline an ontology of the now. These works open up new categories of thought, allowing us to question what had previously seemed inevitable or taken for granted. *Data Grab: The New Colonialism of Big Tech (and How to Fight Back)* belongs to this exceptional category. It is not merely a critical essay on the impact of the digital economy, nor just an analysis of contemporary technology. Rather, it is a far-reaching conceptual intervention —a work that redefines the very terms through which the data regime of the twenty-first century is debated.

The authors invite us to radically rethink the foundations of today's digital economy. What they reveal is neither a sporadic abuse nor an unintended consequence of technological progress, but rather the persistence—and refinement—of a colonial project that was never dismantled, even if it has been obscured by the narratives of development and innovation. From this premise, the contemporary digital order appears as the most advanced phase of a historical process of dispossession and global subjugation.

Data Grab is neither an ethical plea nor a regulatory proposal; it constructs a precise and profoundly illuminating analytical framework. The mass capture of data—now the core mechanism of value accumulation in platform capitalism—functions as a regime of coloniality that redefines social life as an exploitable raw material. This colonialism does not act solely upon bodies or territories. It targets forms of knowledge and modes of being: appropriating everyday practices, communication flows, affective relations, and behavioural patterns. In doing so, it reconfigures subjectivity according to the imperatives of algorithmic governance.

The book sets out, with exceptional clarity, a diagnosis that challenges and unsettles dominant categories. If capitalism cannot exist without colonialism, then digital capitalism, too, must be understood through the lens of its colonial roots. The central thesis is both uncomfortable and unassailable: data colonialism is not a critical metaphor, but an analytical category. It reveals the underlying logic of appropriation, exploitation, and control that structures our present.

Yet the value of *Data Grab* lies not only in the forcefulness of its diagnosis. What sets this work apart is its ability to articulate, alongside a structural critique, a proposal for resistance—one that is framed in collective and emancipatory terms. The book offers both conceptual and political tools for reimagining the possible futures of digital sovereignty, the democratic governance of data, and global epistemic justice.

Organised into six chapters and a conclusion, the work weaves together a critical genealogy of historical colonialism with a sharp analysis of contemporary political economy. Far from any technocentric or moralising approach, the authors construct a narrative that brings together economics, politics, culture, and epistemology. Their aim is to reconfigure the very conditions of possibility for thought and action in the digital age.

The first chapter, *A New Colonialism*, establishes the theoretical foundation of *Data Grab*. The authors not only assert the continuity between historical colonialism and the contemporary digital order, but also demonstrate how the logics of dispossession and domination inherent to colonial modernity are being renewed and rearticulated. Far from proposing a linear or mechanical perspective, the chapter examines how colonialism is reconfigured within the data regime. Algorithmic capture is not merely a reflection of past colonial exploitation; it constitutes an ontologically new form of extraction—one that appropriates vital processes in real time and converts them into data that can be quantified, segmented, and commodified.

In this new phase, data has become the strategic resource par excellence, displacing land or manual labour as the primary source of value. Yet the mechanisms of appropriation continue to reproduce the logic of unilateral expropriation: individuals are transformed into unconscious prosumers, continuously generating data that feeds the accumulation circuits of major tech platforms—without access to the benefits or control over how that information is used.

The chapter develops with precision the concept of data colonialism as a power structure operating across three simultaneous dimensions:

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(1) Epistemic appropriation: the capture of knowledge and social practices, which are translated into formats legible by digital infrastructures.
(2) Economic exploitation: the monetisation of data through predictive algorithms, personalised advertising, and secondary information markets.
(3) Algorithmic governance: the imposition of a normative regime that disciplines behaviour through systems of classification, scoring, and invisible control.

This analysis reveals that digital colonialism is not confined to economic exploitation. It also produces specific forms of subjectivity and governance, in which the individual is addressed, classified, and shaped by algorithmic systems designed to maximise data profitability.

In the second chapter, *Data Territories*, the authors develop the concept of digital territorialisation, showing how colonial logic is renewed through the occupation and exploitation of social life as a new form of territory. The chapter highlights how digital infrastructures—devices, networks, servers, algorithms—operate as instruments of continuous extraction, creating spaces of capture governed by logics of extraterritoriality.

The authors also emphasise the geopolitical dimensions of data colonialism. Global asymmetries are reinforced, as the Global North retains ownership over systems of data collection and processing, while the Global South is increasingly reduced to a provider of data and a target for mapping, classification, and control.

The third chapter, *Data's New Civilising Mission*, forms one of the central pillars of the work's argument. The authors demonstrate how data colonialism is sustained by progress-oriented narratives that re-enact the civilising mission of colonial modernity. In this context, global connectivity, artificial intelligence, and algorithmic personalisation are portrayed as drivers of social development, while concealing their roles in capture and subjugation. These narratives function as ideological devices that normalise the exploitation of data. The rhetoric of efficiency, convenience, and innovation serves to obscure the structural violence inherent in the extraction of personal and social information. Digital progress is thus framed as a moral imperative, reproducing the colonial logic in which those who resist the system's terms are cast as outside of history.

The chapter rigorously deconstructs the notion of technological neutrality, revealing how the supposed objectivity of algorithmic systems is grounded in political and epistemological choices. What is presented as a universal technical procedure is, in fact, a mechanism that silences and subordinates distinct epistemologies. It reinforces dynamics of cultural homogenisation and imposes a hegemonic rationality—one that inherits the legacy of imperial processes in the expansion of Western knowledge.

Chapter Four, *The New Colonial Class*, delves into the formation of the elites who benefit from data colonialism, conceptualised as the new digital colonial class. The analysis is sophisticated, demonstrating that data extraction is not managed solely by the major tech corporations (GAFAM—Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft—symbols of global data extraction and power concentration). Rather, it involves a complex network of actors, including intermediaries, consultants, algorithm developers, data agencies, and state actors.

Of particular interest is the figure of the algorithmic state, which adopts and legitimises digital governance technologies. Far from opposing the power of platforms, many states act as strategic partners, leveraging data collection for purposes of social control, security, or population surveillance. This relationship echoes the colonial dynamic of co-opted local authorities who facilitated imperial domination.

The chapter also outlines how this new colonial class operates within a deregulated global space, where national sovereignty is subordinated to the interests of private tech-nological infrastructures. This gives rise to a transnational regime of power that reproduces the logic of economic imperialism in the age of informational capital.

Far from a deterministic perspective, the fifth chapter, *Voices of Defiance*, brings to the fore practices of resistance that challenge data colonialism. The authors highlight how various social movements, indigenous communities, and digital activists have developed strategies to subvert the extractive logic of digital platforms. One of the most powerful proposals is the call for technological sovereignty. This entails not only control over one's own data, but also the collective reappropriation of knowledge and communication infrastructures. In contrast to the privatisation of information, the chapter advocates for an ethics of the commons—recognising data as a collective good to be managed democratically.

The sixth chapter, *A Playbook for Resistance*, concludes with a practical manual for resistance, organised around three levels of action:

(1) Within the system: through legal reforms, public policies, and regulatory mechanisms designed to limit the power of digital platforms.
(2) Against the system: via digital disobedience, activism, and the boycott of data extraction infrastructures.
(3) Beyond the system: by creating alternative networks and technologies rooted in community governance and the ethics of the commons.

Fully aware of the limits and obstacles faced by resistance strategies to data colonialism, the authors acknowledge the scale of the challenge: confronting omnipresent infrastructures, legal and economic architectures designed to perpetuate capture, and a logic of power that has been naturalised as a condition of contemporary life. And yet, within this recognition lies no surrender, but rather the starting point for what they call a project of radical political imagination—a call to collective action that goes beyond marginal resistance or denunciation. It dares to dismantle the epistemic and material foundations of digital domination.

In this sense, *Data Grab* is far more than a lucid diagnosis or a solid interpretive framework; it is a summons to the integral decolonisation of both present and future. It is a work that reclaims for critical thought its vocation as intervention—its power to open up new horizons of possibility when the present appears sealed by the inertia of the given.

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Within its pages, *Data Grab* offers not only a devastating critique, but also an emancipatory horizon that transcends the narrow confines of privacy policies or data governance frameworks. What is at stake here is the collective reappropriation of knowledge, the reconstruction of digital infrastructures through an ethics of the commons, and the foundation of a new social contract for the data age. This envisions a society in which information is not an expropriated resource, but a shared good; where collective intelligence is not captured by the algorithms of capital, but returned to communities as a tool for emancipation.

What makes *Data Grab* an essential work of reference is its ability to integrate a structural analysis of the political economy of data with an explicit commitment to global epistemic justice. The authors invite us to conceive of digital decolonisation not as a symbolic gesture or a technocratic regulatory exercise, but as a deep process of reconfiguring the political, economic, and cultural order — one capable of redefining the relationship between subjects, knowledge, and technology.

In a time when algorithmic governance threatens to close off the horizon of possibility, *Data Grab* opens a luminous crack. It reminds us that history is not preordained, and that capture is not destiny. Dispossession can be reversed—if we are able to build infrastructures of hope, technologies in the service of the commons, and normative frameworks that return control over life and knowledge to communities. Ultimately, *Data Grab: The New Colonialism of Big Tech (and How to Fight Back)* not only exposes the mechanisms of data colonialism; it offers a roadmap towards the decolonisation of our digital lives. It is an essential work for all those who understand that the struggle for the future is waged not only in phy-sical territories, but also—and above all—in the control of information, in the sovereignty of knowledge, and in the collective capacity to imagine and construct alternative digital worlds.