Introduction

In today's tech driven world, the concept of colonialism casts a shadow revealing inequalities and biases prevalent, in the tech industry. As technology continues to connect people the power dynamics within the tech sector reflect colonial patterns perpetuating disparities and exclusion. This essay aims to explore the idea of colonialism through Sareeta Amrutes framework. We will specifically focus on its impact on software development with a look at the South African software industry, as well as the concept of exploitation and uneven consequences in the broader context of Google's most recent layoff and outsourcing activities. By examining the consequences of colonialism, we will highlight the pressing need for fair practices in technology. Additionally, we will elucidate on the idea of how individuals can play a role, in promoting decolonization efforts advocating for a tech environment that values diversity, fairness and justice for all.

Understanding Digital Colonialism through Amrute's Framework

Amrute describes a broader framework in her keynote at EPIC 2019 for understanding and challenging tech colonialism within the industry. From recognition of colonial practices and the insistence on questioning and resisting colonial structures that are inherent in one's work, the focus is on the ethical considerations that need to centre on the marginalised and their voices and histories. Her work calls for action and provocation toward proactive steps for decolonisation and ethical tech practices on the part of anthropologists and research practitioners in achieving more inclusive, socially just approaches.

Practical steps outlined within this framework include radicalising ethics, joining existing movements, refusing to participate in colonial practices, extending support to marginalised communities, centring marginalised perspectives, grounding ethical decision-making in material realities, embracing joy and collaboration, and challenging oppressive structures. These can be a practical guide for anthropologists and research practitioners to work with by taking actions in their capacities that provide ways to struggle against digital colonialism and towards the making of ethical technology, and inclusive and supportive workplace environments.

Digital colonialism in the tech industry represents contemporary forms of historical colonial characteristics hierarchy, extraction, and exploitation. As it stands, dominant tech giants control important parts of digital infrastructure and resources, deciding the flow of information around the world and reinforcing inequities in access to technology. Recently, antitrust investigations have found that big tech platforms like Google and Facebook have monopolistic dominance over the world's digital ecosystems (Elias, 2024). Second, large data extraction operates without adequate informatic or economic consent and benefit, resulting in the production of surveillance capitalism and gross commodification of human experience for monetization. Third, economic extraction manifests in exploitative gig work where labourers are deprived of basic employment benefits and appropriate labour laws. Lastly, the cultural exploitation of Western-driven tech platforms can result in the erasure of local cultures and knowledge systems, further perpetuating the displacement of cultures and reinforcing the dominant narrative of sameness. All of which, demonstrate the ways in which digital colonialism perpetuates inequalities

and reinforces power imbalances on a global scale, and for this reason, we need more critical reflection and collaborative work toward ethical technology and equitable access for all.

Exploitation and Uneven Consequences

Global software development plays into the concept of digital colonialism and reflects power imbalances and economic exploitation in the tech industry. While these big tech companies, such as Google, have depicted themselves as progressive revolutionaries for years, their labour practices turn out to be something different. According to the labour process theory, as described and explained by Harry Braverman and Michael Burawoy, both of which have stated how the organization and control of work is conducted within the capitalist mode of production, such firms orchestrate control over the labour process for maximum efficiency and profit-making (Burawoy, 1985; Braverman, 1974). One illustrative example is Google's behaviour towards its labour, more specifically in the context of layoffs and offshoring. Recently, just days before its first-quarter earnings report, Google initiated layoffs of at least two hundred employees, part of the layoff of an undefined number of workers in its "Core" teams, with some workers scheduled to be replaced by teams in India and Mexico (CNBC, 2024). This incident is representative of a general trend in the tech industry that sees offshoring of labour to countries with more affordable labour, which is often done at the cost of local workers in countries with a high standard of living. In the framework of the labour process theory, this can be viewed as the extraction of surplus value from labour through the reduction of labour costs and the increase of productivity, which underpins the interest of capital against labour (Burawoy, 1985; Braverman, 1974). Another fascinating example representing these dynamics is the practices of these multinational tech companies in the form of outsourcing their operations. For example, Apple has been criticized for its reliance on contract manufacturers such as Foxconn in China, where workers are reportedly subjected to long hours, low wages, and poor working conditions (Duhigg & Barboza, 2012). Even with the company's incredible profits and its brand image of being an innovator, these supply chain practices bring up questions of labour exploitation and accountability. This enables companies like Apple to maintain high profit margins while literally outsourcing the human costs to vulnerable workers in countries with lax labour regulations. On the other hand, technology work is also associated with precarity and exploitation under the gig economy model. Labour precarity and exploitation are further pushed under the gig economy model by technology companies. Workers who must do content moderation or data labelling or are involved in app development work under precarious conditions, with few labour rights and low wages (Huws, 2018). Often, such workers, even though they contribute to the most important success of tech platforms, do so under conditions of great insecurity, both in terms of well-being and job security. It can be said that it is treated as a disposable commodity. Once again, it speaks to the capitalist drive for maximum efficiency and flexibility in how labour is organized, often at the expense of workers' rights and dignity. Moreover, the cultural influence of tech platforms centred in the West can lead to the marginalization of local cultures and knowledge systems within the global software development community. The dominance of English as the lingua franca of tech industries and the preference for Western perspectives and norms in product development and design could marginalize the experiences and voices of non-Westerners and further promote cultural hegemony. This reflects the

reproduction of capitalist ideology and power structures in the organization of labour, reinforcing existing hierarchies and inequalities.

Implications for the South African Software Development Industry

The effect of colonialism on the software development sector in South Africa is deep, reflecting a complex interplay of power dynamics, exploitation, and cultural influence. Given South Africa's history of colonization, the country grapples with enduring inequalities and marginalization—experiences that intersect with those of challenges in the technology industry. One primary outcome would be gaps and dependence that are prolonged. Often, the African software development sector relies on investment from foreign sources and partnerships with multinational tech companies, which helps to further a neocolonial relationship that sees the exploitation of local talent and resources for the benefit of others. This dependency on entities not only undermines efforts to develop a robust and sustainable domestic tech ecosystem but also limits the opportunity for local innovation and economic empowerment.

Moreover, digital colonialism can worsen those existing inequalities within South Africa, particularly along racial and gender lines. Historically marginalized communities in South Africa, such as black Africans and women, would experience barriers to entry and progression in the tech industry, further entrenching patterns of exclusion and discrimination. There is also a danger, inasmuch as the dominance of Western-centric technological platforms and norms, digital colonialism will equally marginalize indigenous knowledge systems and cultural practices, therefore eroding the diversity and richness that South Africa's digital landscape should have been characterized by.

These implications need a well-rounded strategy, and local empowerment, inclusivity, and decolonization need to be at the forefront. Investments in education and building a diverse and resilient tech workforce will be needed from South African policymakers and industry stakeholders. Entrepreneurship and innovation initiatives in historically marginalized communities can better induct those communities into the tech world. Efforts at curriculum decolonization and promotion of indigenous knowledge systems within tech education can help counteract cultural hegemony, which Western-centric tech platforms enjoy.

My role in decoloniality

As I prepare to enter the corporate realm of the tech industry, I grow increasingly aware of the idea of digital colonialism and its attendant injustices. Informed by labour process theory, I am motivated to contest specific ideologies and power dynamics that run through the sector, especially those propagated by big tech companies. My focus will be drawn toward labour practices and diversity initiatives, always keeping in mind that an individual has the power to be a force for change and will contribute to its decolonization. I am also committed to making sure that we include the voices of the marginalized communities, prioritize their perspectives, and foster collaboration and solidarity throughout the industry. I hope to do so by

ensuring that I am a part of any effort aimed at creating an equitable and just tech space that values the dignity and rights of all workers.

Conclusion

To sum up examining colonialism in the technology sector, I have highlighted the importance of addressing inequalities and power imbalances. By using theories, like labour process theory and understanding the complexities of tech practices it is clear that real change requires both efforts and personal dedication. As I look ahead to my future in tech, I am firm in my commitment; to question prevailing ideologies amplify voices on the margins and push for a fairer industry. Embracing this stance, I believe we can contribute to the fight, for decolonization and create a space where everyone's dignity and rights are respected.

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