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Technocolonialism versus Technofeudalism: Technologies of the Body and Technologies of the Self

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Abstract

The general historical context within which this paper develops is the global expansion of algorithmic technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and social media (YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, etc.). Taking this into consideration, this paper analyses the concept of "technofeudalism". Without refuting the concept in its entirety, the paper argues that despite the name "techno-feudalism", the concept has two fundamental flaws: its treatment of technology and its discussion of feudalism. However, this paper does not stop with a critique of technofeudalism, instead, it proposes to "remedy" these issues by utilizing the concept of technocolonialism. I argue that technocolonialism, is more attuned to the realities of the Global South, specifically the Andean region. Moreover, to go beyond metaphorical allusions to feudalism and an unclear treatment of technology, I derive two methodologically compatible and historically rooted concepts of power: Techniques of the body and Techniques of the Self. In conclusion, this paper argues in favor of an analysis of algorithmic colonialism, capital expansion (from thechnofeudalism) and a non-metaphorical reference to the history of "Andean Feudalism".

Keywords

Technocolonialism, Technofeudalism, Artificial Intelligence, Technology, Feudalism, Technologies of the Self, Technologies of the Body

1. Introduction

The central objective of this paper is to develop a complementary argument to "technofeudalism". To do so I develop a complementary argument: technocolo-

nialism[1]. This paper's historical focus is the Global South in general as well as South Americal and Ecuador in particular. My main source of the technofeudal argument comes from Yanis Varoufakis. His role as a public intellectual entails a large audience for his argument and this paper critically focuses on his approach and, hopefully, reach a portion of his readers. The central questions of this paper are: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the technofeudal analysis? Secondly, is technofeudalism relevant for the Global South? An important contribution of this paper is to discuss the two main concepts in the name technofeudalism: "techno" and "feudalism." As for the former I discuss, following Bruno Latour (1993, 2013), issue of technological associations and its ontological existence in relationship to networks. Secondly, I analyze the "feudal" portion of technofeudalism. I develop this analysis by conducting a comparative historical analysis of the hacienda system in Latin America (basically, Latin American feudalism[2]) with algorithmic platforms and technologies.

The comparative historical analysis helped uncover two co-related concepts, *Technologies of the Self*[3] and *Technologies of the Body*[4] (Burak, 2026), as apparatuses of power. Moreover, given the widespread use of technofeudalism, I ask the question, is it valid for the experience of the Global South, particularly in Latin America and Ecuador? I answer in the negative, arguing that the right conceptual framework within which to better understand the Global South is Technocolonialism. I should at this stage what I understand as technocolonialism. It is the transition from working class or peasant labor to a form of labor which is not technically linked to a wage but it is rooted in the broad concept of servitude in this case, in the AI world. It is part and parcel of a complex, dynamic system of domination which includes labor, class, language (discourse) and modernizing tropes.

Moreover, I ought to stress the importance of this paper's contribution to historical, sociological and political thinking by addressing an issue (AI as a socio-economic force) that, beyond its "trendiness", can have serious socio-political, economic and cultural consequences for the world as a whole.

Finally, I should state this paper's argument's conclusions. This paper concludes that there are four specific indicators linked to technocolonialism in Latin America that are central to understanding AI's development in the region. These are: that it is linked to other, already ongoing civilizing projects, the conquering of territory and the implantation of a social surveillance system. Throughout this paper I explain how, specifically, these indicators develop and what their relation-

[1]There are various authors using this term. I arrived at it independently and use it differently.

[2]Latin American feudalism is the notion of a historically determined mode of production characterized by unwaged labor, social class determined by filial bonds, political power linked to the large-landowning class, the Church and the armed forces and forced labor linked to race, gender and other ethnically-related themes; an important aspect of Latin American feudalism is the ongoing and strengthening theme of progress as a civilizational aspiration of the elite. The Andean Hacienda was at the very center of this system.

[3]Term taken from Foucault (2010), although I employ it differently.

[4]Antoher term inspired by Foucault (2010), but applied in a different fashion.

ship to technocolonialism are.

2. The "Technofeudal" Argument

In my view, the following quote, summarizes the general gist of what my discussion of technofeudalism will be:

> The reference to feudalism…denotes a rentier society, that is, a society not oriented by productivity, but one concerned to the capture of economic value. Currently, there is a prevalence of the logic of obtaining income over the productive logic in companies that are intensive in intangibles, notably in digital platforms. The powerful rise of computerized activities thus called into question the continuity of competitive processes for generating profits. (Durand as cited in Prado, 2021: p. 2)

At its most basic, technofeudalism simply means that the digital economy resembles aspects of feudalism seen in the way digital capitalist extracts value from unassuming users. Why and how? In the analogy with feudalism, lords in technofeudalism are the Tech Giants and their billionaire heads (Amazon, YouTube, Facebook, OpenAI, Anthropic, etc.). Clearly, one of the main aspects of technofeudalism is the direct association to pre-capitalist relations of production and consumption. Thence, to properly assess the technofeudal argument one must assess this very point. I am well aware that feudalism in this sense could be metaphorical; however, Varoufakis's Marxist argument, as I read it, draws a very real comparison, which leads me to take the comparison literally, not metaphorically.

When speaking about Amazon's AI Assistant "Alexa", Varoufakis writes "[it] will never, ever tell you what it truly is: a tiny cog in a vast cloud-based network of power within which you are a mere node, a speck of digital dust, at best a plaything of forces beyond your comprehension or control" (Varoufakis, 2024: p. 62). Moreover, for Varoufakis the road towards the enslavement of cloud users by machines and/or platforms lies not in a "super-bot," rather, it lies in the overwhelming effect that technological innovation can have over human behavior—an effect that cannot be fully judged a priori, but it is likely to create a hype, whether it be warranted or not. The idea of whether an AI-powered software is sentient or not, as many computer scientists believe it will become (see Madianou, 2025), is for Varoufakis, not that important. As he notes, "[i]f [drones] can fly autonomously through a building, choosing whom to kill and whom to spare, who cares that they are not sentient?" (Varoufakis, 2024: pp. 64-65).

There are two questions that I would pose regarding the saliency of the technofeudal argument thus far. First, does the neo-Marxist line of argumentation overlook issues regarding the cloud economy in relation not to the economic aspect, but to the broad implication for power relations that the "feudal" in evokes? With respect to this question, I would posit (detailed discussion below) the following: On the one hand, the technofeudal argument is, in general, a useful heuristic that helps us focus on the (very) real possibility of worsening the neocolonial

status of countries like Ecuador by deepening the already existing feudal relations between the Global North and the United States, specifically, and Latin America. It also shows how the economic forces behind AI and its derivative technologies resemble forms of domination akin to feudalism rather than capitalism. On the other hand, the technofeudal argument, I would posit, overestimates the reach of AI and the cloud economy, falling trap of the ominous predictions of many computer scientists (for a detailed analysis see Narayanan and Kapoor, 2024; also see, Madianou, 2025; Bostrom, 2024).

3. Various Iterations of the Technofeudal Argument

Technofeudalism is not exclusive to Varoufakis. He is not alone in raising the alarm about the cloud economy. Other authors also present the world's state of affairs in dire terms. Some of the main authors that draw a comparison between the cloud economy and feudalism are Arditi (2023), Dean (2025), Yan (2024), Durand (2020), Novianto (2025). These authors have employed the techno-feudal/cloud-slavery framework to highlight the increasing asymmetries between capital and labor, more specifically, the extraction of free data and/or data-hours from users in a fashion akin to pre-capitalist forms of forced labor. In what follows I will briefly point out what distinguishes each author, noting beforehand, the constraints in space that inevitably limits the detail of this review.

One of the main differences between Varoufakis's line of thinking and other "technofeudalists" or "digital feudalists," is the state of capitalism itself. Varoufakis, as mentioned above, thinks that capitalism, as we know it, is receding and, in its place, a feudal-like system where Big Tech billionaires' rule, is making an entrance. Others, like Arditi (2023) view the issue differently. For example, Arditi (2023: p. 2) notes:

> In this book [Society Now: Digital Feudalism], I characterize the current structure of capitalism as built on three tendencies: the need to buy more things, precarious employment, and debt. I call this moment "digital feudalism" to highlight the connection to their earliest formations. However, I do not use the term to suggest the harbinger signaling the end of capitalism, but rather, as a mechanism to show the constantly changing nature of capitalism. (Arditi, 2023: p. 2)

For his part, Arditi employs the concept of feudalism as a historical reference, not as an ominous prediction about the end of capitalism. In his argument capitalism is not at the end of its road. For Arditi, capitalism is, perhaps more perverse, but alive and well. Following a Marxist line of thinking, Arditi directs our attention to two aspects of capitalism that are crucial to understand "digital feudalism": primitive accumulation and planned obsolescence (Arditi, 2023: p. 2). Furthermore, Arditi identifies three elements that are the fundamental characteristics of digital feudalism: unending consumption, precarious labor, and debt peonage. These elements do not differ fundamentally from Varoufakis as he also alludes to

them in much the same way Varoufakis does. Notwithstanding their differences, Arditi, like Varoufakis, technology is central to the plot, but it is never a full protagonist. Technology, for Arditi, is relevant insofar as it is a tool used by capitalists to reproduce the system when in crisis mode. Arditi's reference to feudalism differs from Varoufakis's because servitude is not being produced by a retreating mode of production, but by its increased intensity. In this respect, Arditi (2023: p. 14) notes,

> The term digital feudalism connects to the moment of primitive accumulation as feudalism transitioned to capitalism. Just like how peasants were kicked off the land to go work in new positions without a social safety net, today workers lose their jobs and go work as gig workers. And live in a time when a host of new social needs mean we have to buy more things to exist in society.

Not surprisingly Arditi (2023: p. 149) ends his argument by stating the following:

> We do not yet have a revolutionary ideology for the next social and economic phase. All we have is a system that alienates everyone and further encloses our existence in capitalism. Digital feudalism is not a harbinger of a new system, but rather the doubling down of exploitation.

Another interesting version of technofeudalism is presented by Durand (2020). Here is a short summary given by Prado (2021) (https://eleuterioprado.blog/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/tecno-feudalism-or-socialism-of-capital.pdf: accessed on May 13):

> According to this author [Durand], digital technologies did not bring, as promised by the ideology of Silicon Valley, a radiant horizon for capitalism; on the contrary, they both stiffened neoliberalism and produced the degradation of this mode of production. They reconfigured social relations in a reactionary way: if before them there still prevailed a decentralized system of production of goods in which competition succeeded, with them and through them there was a centralization and monopolization that created a structure of dependence in the sphere of production, a new form of submission of production units to the owners of a particular mean of production. That form—he says—had been suppressed historically by the competitive capitalism of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Competition has been maintained even when the monopolistic phase of capitalism came at the end of the 19th century.

Simultaneously, Durand (2020), a leading proponent of "technofeudalism" finds some of the same issues Varoufakis did. Not only a new form of submission of production that has been created, but the key economic rationale behind capitalism's structure of incentives are rents. A second aspect over which (Ibid.) sets his attention is the digital lords, data surveillance and what he calls the "ideology of Silicon Valley".

Besides what has been stated above, Durand (2020) places a strong emphasis on the political nature of Silicon Valley ideology. This is a distinct form of political rationality which "force feeds" users of digital platforms incessantly. Durand (Ibid.) links this form of political ideology to the fact that under the promise of online freedom, people have become "serfs" based on rent and data-based dissemination. Durand (Ibid.), argues that profit increasingly comes from ownership and control rather than productive investment alone in data collection. Intellectual property, network control, and platform infrastructure allow firms to collect income in ways that resemble rent extraction. Durand (Ibid.) emphasizes that data is not just a commodity but a means of power. Continuous monitoring allows platforms to predict, steer, and monetize behavior, creating asymmetrical dependence. Work becomes fragmented, monitored, and precarious. Gig workers, content moderators, warehouse workers, and sellers on platforms are integrated into systems where algorithms discipline labor and reduce autonomy and rights.

This brief summary makes clear that for Durand (2020), Technofeudalism, emerges out of rentier practices in the form of free data and the governmentalization of digital work where algorithmis define a type of governmentality where "digital lords" govern "pro-bono," so to speak, data providers and warehouse workers. Finally, like the works we have reviewd, there is, again, no discussion of technology as a construct; it is mentioned and placed at the very center of the new digital economy but it is never problematized.

An interessting contribution to the technofeudal argument(s) is the one given by Saito & Sasaki (2026). These authors provide a notable critique from within Marxism. In the abstract to their paper, the authors summarize its contents as follows (Saito & Sasaki, 2026: p. 1):

> However, this discourse [technofeudalism] fails to account for the ongoing dynamism of capitalist investment and competition. In contrast, this paper advances the concept of *rentier capitalism* by revisiting Marx's analysis in *Capital*, with particular attention to his often-overlooked theory of *ground rent* in Volume III. Drawing on Marx's notebooks published for the first time in the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA), the paper argues that rentier capitalism constitutes the most advanced and contradictory form of contemporary capitalism, which accelerates the destruction of the common and undermines the conditions necessary for working-class solidarity.

One of the notable aspects of Saito and Sasaki's paper is the claim that the current state of affairs in capitalism can be directly explained by Marx's ideas, not interpretations of his ideas, but ideas he put in writing. Mainly the authors argue that technofeudalism is a distraction from Marx's critique of rentier capitalism. This accounts for the fact that it is capital not workers that are debilitating (or even destroying) capitalism (Ibid.). To understand their critique of technofeudalism, Saito and Sasaki (2026: pp. 4-5) posit the following:

> His [Marx's] exposition of the "ideal average" of the capitalist mode of production elaborates foundational economic categories—such as "value", "com-

> modity", "money" and "capital"—which are indispensable for understanding capitalism *as such*. These categories are not confined to a particular historical moment but are carefully abstracted from it, so that they form the essential conceptual framework for analysing any historical form of capitalism. For instance, today's financial markets and derivatives can only be properly understood once the concept of "interest-bearing capital" is grasped. The same logic applies to digital rent: although Marx could not have anticipated the current levels of financialisation or the development of the digital economy, this does not render *Capital* obsolete.

This is not all. The authors go as far as to stress that the very idea of technofeudalism is the end result of a general neglect in academia, as I read it, of Marx's ideas on rent[5]. As they put it: "the Marxian category of 'rent' can be generalized as follows: *fixed surplus profits obtained through the monopoly of non-reproducible*, *scarce resources of production and distribution*" (Saito & Sasaki, 2026: p. 6; emphasis in the original). The actual conceptual interpretation undertaken by Saito and Sasaki is as follows: "By updating Marx's analytical framework, it becomes possible to apply the Marxian concept of rent to the contemporary difgital eocnomy, while maintaining clear analogies with ground rent (land = platform, waterwheel = apps, harvest = data, ground rent = difgital rent)" (Saito & Sasaki, 2026: p. 7). Finally, Saito's and Sasaki's argument becomes clearer when they define the types of rent that Marx identified:

While I find Saito's and Sasaki's analysis of Marx's concept of rent, it is difficult not to return to the context within which Marx used the concept of rent. His original idea was that rent arises from very *specific* industries and sectors. Consequently, it is difficult to see the baseline rationale of neo-Marxists when the authors equate land with digital platforms, waterwheels with apps, etc. These plausibility of these equations diminishes when one considers the information. Despite the efforts to present Marx's ideas as ahead of their time, Marx was in reality an historically rooted theoretician of capitalism. When he spoke of rent stemming from land, he meant *land*. In the XIX Century land was a great source of wealth and Marx's analysis of land was, indeed, crucial to understand land in the midst of a massive capitalist expansion. As I see it, the argument presented by Saito and Sasaki could be faulty, at least at some level, for taking Marx's ideas out of their historical context.

4. Power in the Times of Algorithmic Expansion: Technologies of the Self

The easy accessibility to cyberspace is not a coincidence, the fact is that there is a large amount of capital behind them. Consequently,

> if as late as 1945 one in three people on the planet was living under colonial rule, today, around one in three people on the planet has a Facebook account,

[5]It must be said that Marx's main concern when writing about rent was related to mining, agriculture and then specifc ways in which those sectors in particular lend themselves to a rentier economy.

> and almost everyone uses search engines of some sort. The contexts and impacts are obviously different, but this resemblance in scale means that companies like Meta—which now owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp—or OpenAI have a lot of power over the lives of a lot of people. (Mejias & Cowdry, 2024: p. 12)

I would like to illustrate this by presenting the following data regarding Ecuador: Ecuador as a population of 18.2[6] million people; of those, about 15.4 million use social media, which means practically all adults in the country. While AI diffusion is still low, it is, nonetheless a notable number—19.% (Statbase, 2026: https://statbase.org/data/ecu-ai-diffusion-index/). This results from the fact that "Ecuador's internet penetration rate stood at 83.9 percent of the total population at the end of the year [2025]" (Kemp, 2026: https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-ecuador). Moreover:

- A total of 18.0 million cellular mobile connections were active in Ecuador in early 2025, with this figure equivalent to 98.8 percent of the total population. However, note that some of these connections may only include services such as voice and SMS, and some may *not* include access to the internet.
- There were 15.2 million individuals using the internet in Ecuador at the start of 2025, when online penetration stood at 83.7 percent.
- Ecuador was home to 13.5 million social media user identities in January 2025, equating to 74.0 percent of the total population.
- Meanwhile, in early 2025, 65.2 percent of Ecuador's population lived in urban centres, whereas 34.8 percent lived in rural areas.

Google dominates the search engine market in Ecuador with a massive 92.36% overall market share, climbing to over 98% on mobile phones (Statbase, 2026: devices https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-ecuador; accessed on July 3rd).

In this sense technofeudalism got it right—the global (mainly American) capital is largely behind these technologies. However, there are serious shortcomings with the assumption that the unaware participation of cyber platform users leads to the reproduction of class power. I would argue that this bares an evident resemblance to Marxism's notion of false consciousness (see Bottomore, 2000). I will limit my critique here to the following. First, following Karl Popper, it is difficult to generate empirical evidence for this argument as it is not falsifiable (Popper, 2021 [1963]). Second, as Joseph Schumpeter (2003) showed, class conflict is not the main engine for economic change—innovation is. Third, false consciousness is an all-encompassing term for any capitalist social formation—it can be applied indiscriminately, as if there were an exact version of capitalism everywhere.

I have been arguing that technofeudalism largely ignores the different power

[6]I changed the number from 18.5 to 18.2 so that the numbers coincide arithmetically with the other variables. This rounding error and its correcction in on way affects my arguments.

effects at play within technological arrangements—arrangements that cannot be reduced to capital or water downed as a general effect of capitalism. Importantly, as Latour (2013: p. 217) notes,

> [t]echnology, for its part, seeks to be forgotten. Definitely, it is about technology rather than nature that we can say "it likes to." It totally disappears, for two related reasons: the habitual ravages of Double Click [getting to facts without mediation] on the one hand and on the other the confusion that is always made between technology, or the technical.

Furthermore, technology has implications for power arrangements. In this sense, Simondon (2012 [1958]: p. 158; emphasis added), writing in the 1950's noted the following:

> …men [sic.] who have knowledge of technical objects and appreciate their significance try to justify their judgment by giving to the technical object the only status that today has any stability apart from that granted to aesthetic objects, the status of something sacred. This, of course, gives rise to an intemperate technicism that is nothing other than idolatry of the machine and, through such idolatry, by way of identification, it leads to a technocratic yearning for unconditional power. The desire for power confirms the machine as a way to supremacy and makes of it the *modern philtre* (love-potion).

Interpreting Simondon's (2012) statements in the context of 2026, it could be argued that the diverse cyber platforms (AI, social media, et.) are partly about "[c]ivilising missions, economic motives, the exercise of power and the introduction of specific technologies have been deeply intermingled throughout the history of colonialism, but always with an uneven impact that favors some but not others" (e.g., Mejias & Couldry, 2024; Muldoon & Wu, 2023).

As mentioned before, technology is, according to Latour's views an ontology of various arrangements. *This is where I identify the technology of the self.* It is clear in technofeudal writings, that the so-called "cloud serfs" are a substantial part of the technological arrangements that form the algorithmic world, the cloud economy, etc. This information forces us, as researchers, to ask: what exactly would technofeudalists, or Marxist critics have us do with this realization?

The reason for asking this question is because once technology is seen as an arrangement of parts—experientially, it is not as lopsided in favor of capital as an explanandum. In the online world, as Latourian theory would suggest, life online becomes an existential reality, not a virtual one. I would posit that the appropriate description of "cloud serfs" is that of a set of *technological beings* participating in a wider technological arrangement that exploits their unawareness of the data harvesting that online platforms perform. The implications of this change in perspective is not a simple play with words, or semantic trickery. As Mejias and Couldry (2024: p. 11), note

> Today, Big Tech's efforts to explore and expand don't involve continental

> land, but the virtual territories of our datafied lives: our shopping habits, for sure, but also our interactions with family, friends, lovers and co-workers, the space of our homes, the space of our towns, our hobbies and entertainment, our workouts, our political discussions, our health records, our commutes, our studies, and on and on. There is hardly a territory or activity that is beyond this kind of *colonisation*, and there is hardly a corner of the world that remains untouched by its technologies and platforms.

Online traditions, online *identities*, online social interaction, online dating sites, online daily habits and routines, online friendships, online communities, are not just expressions of servitude or of capital entrapment. It remains unclear, the way in which technofeudalism proposes a conceptualization of this complex reality. If one looks at the constitution of technology in Latour's work, it is evident that when evaluating a technology either theoretically, or empirically, one must make reference to the relational elements underlying all technologies. The sense I get from technofeudal writings is that cloud serfs are in a temporary state of "hypnosis" and its precondition for emancipation is their realization of that condition (cf. Lukács, 1926 [1923]). I would posit that this is only a presupposition borne out of affinity with Marxist political economy not a through theoretical proposition. I would argue, moreover, that the ontological field of action resembles Anthony Giddens's model of action where habits and discourse are fundamental. According to Anthony Giddens (1984: pp. 44-45) the model of action initiates, and I paraphrase, with motivation, continues to a type practical consciousness, which makes individuals' reality familiar, objects and infrastructure stable and, of course simplifies, a hypercomplex reality (complex in the sense of multicausality all the way to Quantum Mechanics) so that we can develop experiential habits (an ontological field). The third component of this action model, is discursive consciousness. It is at this stage that individuals or groups contend with other's habits, interpretations, challenges and so on. It is also the stage where one confirms or doubts one's existential certainties. The cloud world is built around these elements, around existential habits, existential certainties, expectations and so on.

Notwithstanding the critical views I have expressed, I take the technofeudal argument seriously as it is revealing and provides a strong analysis of the overwhelming amount of financial capital behind AI and other platforms. But if one takes the technofeudal argument seriously, one must also evaluate what feudalism looked like beyond Europe. Such an analysis must be performed against real historical data; thus, this paper proposes to briefly look at the most important aspects of feudal power relations in the hacienda system in Latin America.

5. Technocolonialism: A Technology over the Body

My argument in this section is that domination in haciendas took the form of a *technology* over *the body*. Before I fully discuss this concept, it would useful to historically contextualize haciendas.

Firstly I, would posit, that a crucially important part of the idea of Technique over the Body, one must know the different social posts and roles that were prevalent from the XVIII Century to the late XIX Century. Thurner (1993: p. 13) calls this the "…local power structure of the hacienda…" Let me quote Thurner (1993: pp. 13-14) at length:

> …in the central Ecuadorian highlands, from at least the late nineteenth century into the middle twentieth, the main figures in the economic hierarchy of the hacienda were the *patron [the gamonal]* … the *administrador* (overseer), the *mayordomos* ([mestizo] field foremen), and the kipus or *mayorales* (Indian [as well as mestizos] "lead men" working directly under the foreman). A series of lesser rotating functions held by *huasipungueros* (male heads of service tenant households) were also significant. These rotating functions included jazinda kwintayuj (a kind of crop night watchmen on the estate), hortelanas (irrigation controllers), and michijkuna (herders charged with guarding the hacienda's flocks). On the haciendas studied, religious functions were historically practiced primarily by the *patrona* (wife of the patron and the matriarch) and by the *fundador* (founder) of the local patron saint's cofradia (informal religious brotherhood of followers). The civil authority of the Indian community was invested in the regidor (leader, sometimes also referred to as apu), who "passed the staff" to the alcalde… (staff holders), a group of rotating Indian male heads of households charged with specific obligations to sponsor the annual fiesta de alcaldes of carnival. The regidor had been chosen by a parish priest sometime in the distant past (beyond memory), and the position was passed down to the eldest son. The parish priest attended and legitimated the ceremony of generational succession to regidor status. The *fundador* office dealing with the shrine to the patron saint was also an inherited position. He or she selected the *priostes* (pages) who would bear the *priostazgos* (page obligations) or cargos of the annual patron saint festival. The *fundador* also answered to the parish priest, commissioning his presence for a mass, procession, and other vigil services for the shrine.

In the social formation of the hacienda the central figure was then *gamonal*.[7] He (mostly men) embodied symbolic and physical power in haciendas. Part of the gamonal's power was linked to the concept of *blanquitud*, among other sources. *Blanquitud* is crucial because it encompasses a series of symbolic forces that were crucial for the functioning of the hacienda as a hacienda. *Blanquitud*, was a social condition and discursive formation which was rooted in a combination of Catholicism, land power (in the sense of ownership of large estates), connections to political power and, importantly, he represented the embodiment of Eurocentric modernity (Guerrero, 2010). According to (Guerrero, 1991: p. 35),

[7]Gamonal is at once the feudal lord and the symbolic manifestation paternalism, modernism and whitness.

> To enjoy the social presence as "modern" (thereby a "capitalist") it was not enough to be modern it was crucial to appear as such. Form became substance, that which was accidental became essential, that which was casual became necessary, the rhetorical central, and a peculiar modern identity emerged, "blanquitud," according to which it is not enough to be modern-capitalist, one must *resemble* one.

In this sense, class cannot be separated from race. And, importantly: "modernity, class and God-give superiority" in haciendas had a look: a white male. Moreover, as Madianou (2025: p. 6) notes in reference to postcolonial states in Latin America, "[r]acial and social orders outlive direct colonization and organize the distribution of material and epistemic resources, which in turn reproduce and naturalize racial orders."

Ethnographer Lyons (2006: p. 225) interviewed a former hacienda indigenous laborer; in the interview the laborer, whose name was Tayta Alberto, recounted that during hacienda times,

> "[t]hat life was a marvelous life, because of the admonishments, the words of instruction…. That's how the elders taught us greetings. 'You are greeting Father God, not us,' they said …. If someone who was not too much of a troublemaker listened to what they said and responded, 'May God repay you,' Father God then remained in our memory and in our little heart."

Moreover, *Tayta* Alberto recognizes that "Hacienda residents themselves sometimes solicited ritualized lessons in respect. This is part of the reasons why Tayta Alberto and his peers, now elders themselves, look back with such nostalgia to the ways hacienda-era authorities inculcated respect." The *gamonal's* power was rooted on a series of complex concrete power sources (land and symbolic power). For example, López Andrade & Terán Romo Leroux (2025: p. 80; emphasis added) note that:

> Gamonales were protagonist in [the history of haciendas] given their political influence, the economic resources and their ideological association with the Catholic Church. *Gamonalismo* in Cimborazo [a province in Ecuador]… was a domination phenomenon articulated to the hacienda regime, in which gamonal power structured a system of private *administration of indigenous populations*… the hacienda forged a hierarchical order in which the hacienda owner… was conceived as a social *ideal*: a dominant figure, paternalistic and protective whose authority was sustained by a deeply internalized and reproduced by a symbolic formation. This dimension reinforces the notion of *gamonalismo* as a form of material and symbolic rooted in linkages [relations] of structural dependency.

At this point it would be useful to synthesize some of the content of what has mentioned above. I argue that the Technique over the Body is a composite of physical control over the bodies of laborers, but perhaps more importantly as the

allusion to *Tayta* Alberto clearly shows, the power over bodies implied that some of the laborers found the hacienda's system "appealing". Just like "cloud serfs" today, the technology over the body was a set of relations mediated by objects, tools etc. *Tayta* Alberto is saying that the most valuable aspect of the hacienda is how he was taught to conduct—to learn respect. It is surely interesting to learn that laborers (surely *Tayta* Alberto was not the only laborer who thought that way) found the notion of respect as a positive attribute of a hacienda. This reveals an ontological question: respect (whatever that means) is a lived experience of *Tayta* Alberto—a part of the constitution of his sense of self and oh his body in terms of his behavior. Notwithstanding the surprising response of *Tayta* Alberto, I argue that this type of sentiment is, in part, what makes the system Technocolonial (techno- and colonial, as shown above).

According to Andrés Guerrero, the main collection of data in haciendas was preserved in the Hacienda Books[8]. There were three hacienda books, all of which were recognized by the Ecuadorian state as a legitimate sources of population data and therefore management. The main hacienda book, however, was the "*libro de la gente o de la peonada*" (Book 1—the book of people or of the peons) (Guerrero, 1991: p. 98). Data recorded in Book 1 sought to account for laborers' habits, their families, the number of *huasipungueros*, the age of male *conciertos*, and number of family members, tabs of debts owed to the hacienda, labor hours measured in *rayas*[9] worked, plowed, planted, harvested etc. The hacienda book was a critical *technology*, with the hacienda "representatives" on one side and the rest groups on the other and the technique of management of population mediating the relationship. The Hacienda Books I just mentioned are central to the overall technology over the body. In terms of this technology it would to quote Foucault on an excerpt from that captures the power or administrating subjects:

> Political power, *before acting on ideology*, *on the consciousness* of individuals, exerts itself in a much more physical way on their bodies. The way in which gestures, attitudes, usages, allotments in space, and modalities of housing are imposed—this physical, spatial distribution of people belongs, it seems to me, to a political technology of the body (Foucault, as cited in Behrent, 2013: p. 83)

The technology over the body functioned, moreover, by merging two opposite poles: festivities and physical punishment. Festivities, as mentioned earlier had to do with a ritual of that was crucial for haciendas (Guerrero, 1991: p. 20). These festivities clearly reflected Max Weber's argument regarding the difference between Catholicism and Purinatism. In the hacienda's festivities the *prioste* gained social prestige by showing extravagance by providing food, symbolic gestures

[8]There were a few Hacienda Books. The one I use to exemplify technology is directly relevant to this paper's discussion. None of the other books contradict the argument I develop in this section.

[9]A *raya* is a measurement system. It was used to account for how much a conceirto had to work and how many nrayas he/she acturally worked. This classified, at the same time, who was worthy of praise and who was deserving of punishment.

(crosses, flowers, dances, fireworks, etc.) and, importantly, alcohol, all of which were beyond his (again, mostly men) means.

6. Synthesizing Techniques over the Self and the Body

In the following section, I present a synthesis of the paper's argument regarding the techniques of the body and self. The analytical aim is to provide the basis for future historical analyses. AI is the "way of the future." I would be useful to provide a reflection on technofeudalism. If observes closely, it is easily to confirm that there is a line being established between those who know AI and those "who use ChatGPT like Google." This manifestation of technocolonialism means that history repeats: technology is being used to categorize populations on the basis of technology. Echoing Foucault (2010), there are five objectives in association between progress/development and technological "supremacy." These objectives are repetitive bodily gestures**,** docile bodies, accepting subjects (accepting their condition of underdevelopment) and compliant subjects (Foucault, 2008).

At the outset of this section, I had mentioned synthesizing the techniques over the body and the self. These points are:

1) The Civilizing Project. Progress, modernity, development… these are various iterations of the civilizing tendencies of technological superiority in the historical context of modernity. I would like to point out that, once again, elites in countries like Ecuador, ready to open the country to the frontiers of modernity ignoring (purposefully or not) that their own interests will also be affected by the overwhelming strength of data harvesting. In addition, given the weak institutionalization of Ecuador's political and economic institutions, one may reasonably expect a radically ineffective regulatory frameworks for AI. As Mejias and Coudry (2024: p. 16) note, "Big Tech too has a civilizing mission that is mixed up with its technologies and business goals. Part of this civilizing mission continues to revolve around Western science: network science, data science, computer science, and so on."

Similarly, it is important to emphasize that AI is being declared the frontier of human progress and expressed in the discourses of progress—discourses that, by the way, were central to the coloniality of power during the hacienda system. Today, as Antoinette Rouvroy et al. (2013: p. V) note "in the algorithmic governmentality era one is rather witnessing a colonization of public space by a hypertrophied private sphere." Moreover, Mejias and Cowdry (2024) note that, "Big Tech too has a civilizing mission that is mixed up with its technologies and business goals. Part of this civilizing mission continues to revolve around Western science: network science, data science, computer science, and so on." During the hacienda system, the civilizing mission was not rooted on science but on the ideal of the *gamonal*, who be equated to the computers and gadgets, and the Church's discourse regarding the next life, which can be equated with science. Le me explain, the *gamonal* administered populations, calculated rents and losses, etc., In the XXI Century science is the preeminent institution for truth finding. Well, three centuries ago, all the up the XX Century, that role was occupied by the Cath-

olic Church in the case of Ecuador (and Latin America in general). Life in haciendas, apart from designated celebrations, was about largely organized by the belief in a natural order that God had dictated for the different peoples within the system. The citation mentioned earlier from *Tayta* Alberto, an indigenous laborer, is worth repeating:

> "[t]hat life was a marvelous life, because of the admonishments, the words of instruction… That's how the elders taught us greetings. 'You are greeting Father God, not us,' they said… If someone who was not too much of a troublemaker listened to what they said and responded, 'May God repay you,' Father God then remained in our memory and in our little heart." (Guerrero, 1991: p. 55).

Tayta Alberto's nostalgia for the "respect" that was inculcated during the hacienda times is worth a close look. It should be said however, that more likely than not, this is in reference to the respect one learned for one's superiors, especially the *gamonal*, the priest, and God "himself." This is, I would argue, the quintessential expression of a civilizing project in full effect.

2) Conquering Territory. During the hacienda period, a critical aspect of the system was the monopolization of the most important factors of production: land. Large landholdings were the norm. The administration of populations took place within these large spaces as each had their own population (see above for a full discussion of the administration of populations). The concentration of land during the hacienda period had dismal economic outcomes for Ecuador. The size of these landholdings which could easily reach 30.000 hectares was not fully known by its owner. Moreover, the low technological, labor-intensive formula was unable to produce surplus value and most of the money collected by the hacienda owner was in the form of rents. But I should reiterate, the main problem was the concentration of land.

What does this have to do with the algorithmic space? A lot. At the top of the list is the expansion of data harvesting. "Data's modes of expansion are technical and software-based; they relentlessly expand the scale of data territories, in the process completely reorganizing the spaces where we live and work." Just as in haciendas landholding expansion, the expansion of data territories, not unlike haciendas, affects where people's live and work.

Furthermore, the capture of virtual territories and data spaces in linked to Point 1 above in various ways. As Mejias and Couldry (2024: p. 13)

> Forms of economic and cultural extermination will, necessarily, take time to unfold, but they are the potential consequences of a change we can already see: a major shift in power relations that flows from the capture of virtual *territories*. Meanwhile, a very different story is being told about data, told with a much more positive twist. And here too there is a historical parallel. Colonialism has always required a strong civilising mission, an imposed worldview that dismissed all alternatives and rendered invisible all contribu-

> tions emanating from the colonised. This worldview allowed the colonisers to control not just bodies, but hearts and minds as well. In the past, Christianity and Western science were the cornerstones of this civilising mission. They delineated the path towards the salvation of colonised souls and promised them a share in humanity's scientific progress, provided they remained within their assigned roles.

Perhaps one of the most telling commentaries about the theme of this point is the following:

> We, as consumers of digital services, certainly don't know much about the data-processing operations that go on behind the scenes in a data territory. But if we try to leave that territory, or do things within it that don't conform to the territory's rules, all sorts of legal and practical constraints get put in our way. In that sense the data territory is definitely bounded like a physical territory.

This much could be said about haciendas. Laborers, as opposed to consumers, did not know what was recorded in the hacienda books (Guerrero, 1991) were being written. If they tried to leave the territory of the hacienda or the laborer's behavior did not conform to the hacienda's rules, punishments would follow. This was indeed the case in the physical territory of haciendas.

Finally, I will call upon one of the central points of technofeudalism to express the thrust of capital expansion. I am referring to financial capital injected into data territories in the United States. Without counting SpaceX (valued at 1.75 trillion dollars at its Initial Public Offering), there are two American AI companies, Anthropic and OpenAI. The capital at their IPO is $900 billion (Bloomberg Online, 2026a: https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-04-29/anthropic-considering-funding-offers-at-over-900-billion-value: Accessed on July 4th) and $852 (Bloomberg Online, 2026b: https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-03-31/openai-valued-at-852-billion-after-completing-122-billion-round: Accessed on July 4th) respectively. Indexing these firms required a substantial change in IPO rules to accommodate them. The irony of these financial movements is that finding buyers will prove difficult as there are trillions of dollars in stocks. There is one fund that could afford the target these companies have set: the savings of retirees and other private savings accounts. In sum, data territories or large algorithmic fields are directly comparable to hacienda's concentration of land in the hands of a handful of families in Ecuador. As Mejias and Couldry (2024: p. 11) note "Today, Big Tech's efforts to explore and expand don't involve continental land, but the virtual territories of our datafied lives: our shopping habits, for sure, but also our interactions." Moreover, the authors (Mejias & Couldry, 2024: p. 53) note,

> A network and a computer space dominated by commercial imperatives would set no limit on how computers can track each other's information for commercial advantage; it would set no limit on human beings' vulnerability

> to continuous data extraction. Those experts sensed that the whole of everyday space could be transformed into what, looking back, we can see as data territories.

Finally, the authors note that "[t]here is hardly a territory or activity that is beyond this kind of *colonization*, and there is hardly a corner of the world that remains untouched by its technologies and platforms."

3) Late Recipients of Innovation and Knowledge. As Wallerstein (2004) would put it, the countries of the Global South will be the late recipients of innovations in AI, likewise, the decision-making structure around AI is not going to be taken at the periphery but at the center. The periphery will get, to put it crudely, the leftovers from decisions and events taking place in the Global North. Peripheral countries, like Latin American countries after independence will depend more or less entirely in what the North can spare and what the North decides in terms of their role in the global political economy. As Madianou (2025: p. 5) argues, "[c]olonialism did not end with the political independence of postcolonial states. It has deep roots and manifests itself in all aspects of public and private lives globally." Similarly, Muldoon and Wu (2023: pp. 5-6) note that, "[t]he global distribution of AI-related work is highly unequal, with high-value, stable jobs concentrated in the West and low-paid, precarious tasks (like data labeling and content moderation) outsourced to workers in the majority world."

4) Surveillance. The final process that I consider qualitative comparable, is surveillance. At a much different scale, surveillance was for the hacienda what determined not only punishments and an eventual reward, but also, especially for *huasipungueros*, their entire existence. With respect to AI, Mejias and Cowdry (2024: p. 15) note that,

> Ways of processing data are also heralded as scientific achievements, a gift that promises convenience, connectivity and new forms of intelligence. But look under the surface of this civilising gift, and you will find that it also brings new forms of surveillance (through facial recognition or workplace monitoring), discrimination (when algorithms deny or control access to services based on people's profiles) and exploitation (when gig workers' wages are continuously adjusted downwards, for instance).

The panopticon as a workplace place (as it were) pressures on people to "behave as they should" (Foucault, 2007). The correct comparison between haciendas and AI is that in the hacienda, *conciertos* never knew when or at what time the mayordomo was going to appear and take notes of individual behaviors. The surveillance in the hacienda worked out of a sense of never fully knowing when one was going to be surveilled; in the AI, the power over people's behavior (the power over the self) is that more and more, we are being surveilled at all times.

7. Conclusion

I have argued that technofeudalism is revealing in an area which is not denoted by its name—"technofeudalism". This area is the intervention of capital (see my

discussion of capital above). I contend that technofeudalism under develops the "techno" and the "feudalism". In terms of technology, I followed Bruno Latour in recognizing that technologies go beyond gadgets or algorithms. Technology, as Latour notes is not made out of its own "substance"; as he points out, a city's electric grid is not made of electricity. Like capital, technology is a social relation mediated by simple or complex tools. It develops in networks that are difficult, if not impossible, to predict. Technologies are characterized by a series of discontinuities that are eventually provides technological flows. With this discussion I sought to "remedy" technofeudalism's deficit in its analysis of technology. Likewise, I have sought to remedy the deficit in its discussion of feudalism. Based on historical comparison I developed forms of comparing feudalism in the Andes with the feudal-like actions of AI and algorithmic regimes. A central aspect of my argument is to stress the issue of power by identifying two paradigmatic forms of power belonging to algorithmic "rule" denominating it "Power over the Self", while feudal rule was titled Power over the Body. These two concepts, I posit, make two different epochs comparable by utilizing concepts rooted on similar logic (inspired by mathematical comparisons, which demand comparable, analogous measures like distance). Lastly, I established four categories that combine the analysis of haciendas and algorithmic territories, making them comparable and, in the process, turning the concept of techno-feudalism about technology and feudalism.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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