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'Datafied dividuals and learnified potentials': The coloniality of datafication in an era of learnification

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ABSTRACT

Widespread popular discourse, at the time of writing, is centring on the capabilities of AI technologies, among others, in utilising the readily available mass of data to augment claimed educational problems. These positions often elide the unobjective nature of algorithms and the socio-politically infused assemblages of data available, situated within the neoliberalist scientism dominating educational policy discourse. The simplicity with which datafication treats education has led to a global culture of data-driven techno-rationality that affords ultra-rapid forms of free-floating control settled on an ideology of dataism. Dataism rests on the assumption that sociality and subjectification can be reduced to quantifiable data whereby the student rather than being treated as a subject comes to be treated as data doppelganger. The injustices inherent in datafication and its associated epistemes ignore hidden neoliberal inequalities and maintain the insidious coloniality inherent in advanced capitalism, while simultaneously fuelling the rapid and cyclical stripping of purpose from education itself. There is a need to problematise the hidden logics of coloniality that are both maintained and reproduced within the datafication agenda. The current article draws on decolonial theory to animate the logics of datafication through a Deleuzian reading, situated within the learnification of neoliberal education.

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Introduction

The consequences of the increasing neoliberalisation of social life has resulted in the dominance of marketized conceptions of education in mainstream policy discourse. Further, the rapacious intensification of 'late neoliberalism' (McGimpsey, 2017) has crystallised the prototypical model of the rational individual at the heart of modern capitalism, ushering in a distinct carelessness and competitive existence (Lynch, 2022), bolstered by a deeply seated global scientism (Olson, 2016). This scientism is ubiquitous across sites of social policy making (Ezrahi, 2012) and arguably has become more deep seated in education in the wake of the global pandemic (Delahunty, 2024). Within such a culture, the place of datafication is multivalent. This ideology rests on the insistence that every aspect of social life must be transformed into data to be exchanged within the system of capitalism (Coudry & Mejias, 2019). The sociopolitical references to the necessity of data and 'evidence' in informing curricular policy and funding for education are replete in political discourse. For instance, it would be a rare occurrence today to find transcripts of

parliamentary debates on education policy not referencing a nation's most recent international assessment performances. These data-driven narratives scrape from these performances, manipulating and re-presenting acclaimed 'facts' to the public as grounds for further reform in the system. This is but one aspect of the datafication permeating the neoliberal scientism of mainstream educational discourses.¹ This article is concerned with the overall enunciation² framing the landscape for educational action and problematising some of its central logics. My concern as a critical scholar opposed to the transmogrifications of neoliberalism in education is with the manners in which these datafied cartographies adulterate processes of subjectification; flattening the complex, messy and intermixed flows involved, through their concealed logics of coloniality and desires for control.

This article therefore represents an opportunity to dialogue with this enunciation considering the potential for the framing—perhaps restriction—of subjectivities for key educational bodies, such as students, teachers, and scholars among others. This work builds upon the proposition from Sefton-Green and Pangrazio (2022) that 'datafication has implications for the constitution of the educative subject (i.e. who is being educated), the system they learn in (i.e. how they learn) and the information they encounter (i.e. what they learn)' (p. 2077). However, where their work was principally focused on the educative subject, I remain focused on the broader system and in particular its racial-colonial-capitalist exigencies (c.f. Issar, 2021).

Foucault (2005) forwards the notion of a 'fold' or contact point between technologies of domination and technologies of the self where power and subjectification meet. From Biesta's perspective, this purpose of subjectification becomes repressed within the contemporary *neoliberal dispositif of learnification* (Biesta, 2010), which overemphasises *qualification*, but it would be mistaken to believe processes affecting individual subjectivities are not occurring. This is of course central to Foucault's theorising of subjectification as the processes of becoming a subject bound up within a discursive complex of truths/power/knowledge (Foucault, 1982). Subjectification is conceptualised from different vantages in both Biesta's and Foucault's theories and while space is unavailable to do justice to a full analysis of the contrasting and overlapping tenets, a few words feel important here.³ Foucault, according to Ball (2013), writes on subjectivity from two distinct emphases encompassing his earlier genealogical work on subjectivity as the activity where one becomes 'subject to someone else by control and dependence' (Foucault, 1982, p. 212), and the later Foucault which investigates the ways in which the subject gives form to their life. This latter work treats the subject as more agentive and a key site of resistance to power (Ball, 2012), but most strikingly works from the assumption that individuals are free and where '[p]ower is exercised only over free subjects' thus allowing the subject 'a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions, and diverse comportments may be realized' (Foucault, 1982, p. 221). This gives a sense of the political possibilities of subjectivity; a politics of refusal, where resistance to power can be manifested by becoming different (as subject) to the restricted possibilities sketched by the 'matrix of intelligibility' (Butler, 1990). Foucault's work, particularly later contributions, presents the complex, dynamic, and political components of subjectification within the matrix of power, where importantly, no subject—or educational theorist for that matter—can 'be' outside of its influences.

In contrast, Biesta's focus on subjectification which, being intricately bound up with his concerns for the suppression of the purposes of education within a global movement to 'learnification' (Biesta, 2009), centres the notion of a 'qualified freedom' or 'an existence in and with the world' (Biesta, 2022, p.48), where education's purpose is to help students identify and come to terms with their 'subjectness' or freedom. In this view, freedom lies at the core of Biesta's theory, which Zhao (2014) takes issue with as there is a failure to question the nature of this freedom, and tendency to conflate this with subjectification itself. In any case, Biesta's project is to unsettle the overemphasis on qualification that presently dominates the purpose of education rather than theorising what this outlook might be in itself. There are overlaps between Biesta's and later Foucault's theorising of subjectification and the centrality of freedom, but

Foucault offers a more thorough look at political aspects of this concept and especially in relation to the operation of power, which is central to the concerns of this present article. Moreover, Foucault's later works, which do take up the idea of agency to a greater extent than his earlier texts, signpost the key role that 'technologies of the self' play in governance. This, as authors such as Lynch (2022) have shown in the context of neoliberalism, sketches a plane of intelligibility where subjectivity considered only in terms of homo economicus' enact powerful modes of self-responsibilisation. This signals some potential limitations in Biesta's treatment of freedom core to his concept of subjectification, which from a Foucauldian stance, underestimates the subjectivising power of broader neoliberalised forces.

Through a practical fore fronting of the complexity of subjectification, I draw on decolonial and Deleuzian frames of thought to dialogue with the hidden colonial logics of datafication within the neoliberal educational assemblage. I aim to excavate some of these logics across both policy and praxis in education and in particular the conceptualisation of various subjects within the assemblage. This is a critical step in challenging the perpetual inequalities preserved and intensified within the temporalities of late neoliberalism. This is no small challenge in the current era of techno optimism and its 'progressive convergence of "nano-bio-info-cogno" (NBIC) technologies of control 'of the body that can be programmed and reprogrammed' (Peters, 2020, p. 158). This signals the synchronous evolutionary potentialities of neoliberalism and scientism (Delahunty, 2024) that are now infiltrating aspects of the body and reconstructing (neoliberal) subjectivities through a deep seated 'dataism' (Van Dijck, 2014) supporting the naturalisation of the logics of datafication and 'banal positivism' (Gillborn & Delahunty, forthcoming).

In what follows, I outline the theoretical sources for my present argument drawing upon decolonial and Deleuzian perspectives, as well as the background of Biesta's critique of the discourses of learning and their effects on education or what he terms 'learnification' (Biesta, 2009). In doing so I will draw synergies between these various perspectives which inform my consideration of the datafication of education. I map an encounter with post-colonial and decolonial scholarship that emphasises the practices and discourses comprising the foundation of the modern world, and specifically the Eurocentrism and coloniality of knowledge structuring the raft of inequalities within (Fúnez-Flores, 2024). I draw upon this body of work to unsettle familiar encounters with Deleuze and Biesta to contribute to the body of work on datafication sweeping educational practice and discourse, particularly critical perspectives concerned with the elided inequalities within. While I write from my position as a critical psychologist of education, which unavoidably informs my critique of neoliberal datafication, I do not claim to make a contribution to decolonial theory which could be deduced as a settler move to innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012). The contribution of the work, aimed at the broader global level of discourse on education, invites the reader to engage with the potential situated inflection of coloniality inherent to datafication in their context in an attempt to unsettle the seeming naturalness of datafied agendas. Reflecting the unique peculiarities of coloniality and the ways in which its logics are performed across different spatial and temporal terrains, the paper offers a catalyst for thought and, hopefully, provides a stimulus to open directions for further scholarship and critique, building upon Tuck and Yang (2012) challenge that 'decolonisation implicates and unsettles everyone' (p.7).

The coloniality of control societies and resultant learned potentials

It is constructive to call upon Foucault's theorising of disciplinary power through surveillance, which for him was epitomised in the idea of the *panopticon* and its constant all-seeing observation which imputes an internalised self-governance, where individuals police themselves through a life of 'conscious and permanent visibility' (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). However, this notion of disciplinary power operated, for Foucault, within sites of enclosure, which is where Deleuze claims there persists a crisis; 'a generalized crisis in relation to all the environments of

enclosure—prison, hospital, factory, school, family’ (Deleuze, 1992, pp. 3–4). Within the Foucauldian conceptualisation it is the process of the individual passing through these sites of enclosure that governed their subjectification and productive conformity within the system of capitalism. As Deleuze unpacks, this has now shifted as the ‘corporation has replaced the factory, and the corporation is a spirit, a gas’ (Deleuze, 1992, p. 4). This delineates the pervasive reach of neoliberal rationalities today within what could now be considered the *societies of control*. Discipline is superseded by a new system of domination which works by ‘continuous control and instant communication’ (Deleuze, 1995, p. 174). These non-somatic free-floating forms of control can be seen in the centrality that data holds within the performativities of neoliberalised educational praxis and discourse (Bradbury, 2019). Further, the shifting technopolitics at the heart of contemporary governance (Peters, 2020) is reflected in Deleuze’s characterisation of societies’ signature machines:

One can of course see how each kind of society corresponds to a particular type of machine—with simple mechanical machines corresponding to sovereign societies, thermodynamic machines to disciplinary societies, cybernetic machines and computers to control societies. But the machines don’t explain anything, you have to analyse the collective apparatuses of which the machines are just one component (Deleuze, 1995, p. 175).

In this analysis Deleuze presciently signals the technological developments that have facilitated datafication, ‘express[ing] those social forms capable of generating them and using them’ (Deleuze, 1992, p. 6). This has potent resonances within the popular discourses surrounding the educational impact of AI, for example. In imbricating the social constructions that mobilise these technologies of control, Deleuze points us to a macro plane or ‘collective apparatuses’, which needs to be analysed to attain a fuller understanding of the control societies. This is a salient point for the present discussion, and one that in order to realise an orientation to true social justice must reconcile with the legitimising scientific rationality—which elevates the data-driven exigencies—at the heart of neoliberal governance (Ezrahi, 2012). Deleuze locates such logics through a further contrast of disciplinary from control societies, where: ‘Enclosures are *molds*, distinct castings, but controls are a *modulation*, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point’ (Deleuze, 1992, p. 4, Original emphasis). This centres the broader systemic complex capable of motivating datafied rationalities within Western capitalism, and from a critical decolonial perspective, realised on the contiguity of racist-colonial logics of subjectification (Wright, 2022). The idea of modulation Deleuze calls upon, in this instance, marks concepts such as flexible learning and the politics of disequilibrium that are core to late neoliberal ideologies, where individuals are constantly interred as resources to the capitalist matrix of production.

This animation of enunciative logics, and their technologies of control in education is a core rationale motivating my anti-colonial stance in this paper. Decoloniality rests as a critical approach to analysing and resisting the insidious dominative powers underpinning modernity (Quijano, 2007). In particular, positioning coloniality at the hub of a triarchy; Coloniality/Decoloniality/Modernity (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), facilitates the visualisation of knowledge as essential to the modern world order, which in its progressive narrative elides the violence and abuses committed against the global south in the construction and legitimisation of Western capitalism (De Lissovoy, 2019; Fúnez-Flores, 2024; Mignolo, 2023; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Wright, 2022). Walter Mignolo has theorised, through his geopolitics of knowledge central to the functioning of the Colonial Matrix of Power (CMP), a systemic level *enunciation* which affirms the symbolic and conceptual aspects of domains (e.g. political, sexual, epistemic) of the CMP, ‘where the domains are defined and interrelated’ and where ‘patriarchy is located’ (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 143). The enunciation functions as the location of knowledge and ‘composes of actors, languages, and institutions’ (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p.143) committed to the preservation and (capitalist) expansion of

colonial world ordering. Historically speaking, the role of racial scientism in enunciating an ostensibly natural human hierarchy, constructing who is to be counted as human, was central to colonial expansion through the *enunciated* (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) 'noble' narratives of civilising the sub-human indigenous populations, elevating them to quasi-human status in the light of European society (Seth, 2009; Smith, 2012). Here 'infallible' data, particularly that derived from pseudoscientific fields such as psychological intelligence testing and eugenics, presented the 'naturalness' of human hierarchies (Zuberi, 2001) central to capitalist labour and exploitation. Decolonial theory therefore brings into scope the universalisation of Western scientific knowledge, as means of naturalising racist ideologies, and challenges the epistemic injustices wrought under capitalism. This position advocates an interdependency between capitalism and colonialism that rejects any separation of the two (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Ricaurte, 2019).

While facilitating a critical encounter with the social constructions 'enunciating' control societies, a decolonial reading renders the hidden 'code' of control societies, Deleuze (1992) elevates in the 'corporatisation' of life, with its racial-colonial underpinnings. Consequently, these logics of domination become extended and expansive within the datafied realities enabled by advanced technologies of mass-monitoring (Bradbury, 2019). These technologies and their datafied onto-epistemologies render individuals as 'dividuals' (Deleuze, 1992), not holistic manifestations of the subject but a fragmented, divided picture represented by data within a continuous network where potentials are contained within the code (Niesche, 2015). Here the coloniality of power within education, as was the case with historical colonialism, is realised within the free-floating surveillance instilled by datafication, where the boundaries between the corporate world and the public school collapse relinquishing education to '[...] frightful continual training, [and] to continual monitoring' (Deleuze, 1995, p. 175). This datafied neoliberal coloniality is cloaked within the popular mainstream discourses and language associated with Biesta's critique of 'learnification' (e.g. Biesta, 2009, 2015).

'Learnification' can be traced back over a decade, where Biesta (2009) problematises the emergent rhetoric of the educational measurement agenda which resulted in the 'new language of learning'. The core concern related to the supersession of educational purpose with empty notions of student-centred learning and led to his proposal of three purposes for education: *qualification*, *socialisation* and *subjectification* (Biesta, 2009, 2015). Within learnification, the over-emphasis on qualification has been facilitated by the rise of neoliberalism and resulted in the narrow concerns of learning outcomes and raising standards. The challenge this poses to democratic visions of educational purpose lies in the seeming progressiveness of the concept, where altruistic rhetoric of 'equality of access' and 'quality' are espoused for the inherent good of the individual student. For example, school league tables are promoted 'combining accountability and choice with a social justice argument which says that everyone should have access to education of the same quality' while simultaneously the generation of data is couched in 'progressive' goals 'to identify so-called "failing schools", and in some cases, "failing teachers"[...]' (Biesta, 2009, p. 34, my ellipsis). Here the quantitative surveillance of schools is rationalised within seemingly noble concerns for educational opportunities. Importantly, Biesta's criticism is primarily concerned with the social infrastructures and discourses that enable learnification. Biesta (2015, p. 76) highlights some of these influences as occurring within a nexus of theory, policy, and practice where, for example, critiques of 'authoritarian forms of education' have met with 'the rise of new theories of learning, particularly constructivist theories, which are 'particularly relevant in the shift towards lifelong learning'. The ostensible progressiveness which is lauded within learnification reveals a polyvalence of flows disguising a suite of nefarious systemic logics under neoliberalism.

Neoliberal resilience is demonstrated in the co-opting of constructivist theory which as opposed to challenging its logics, is modulated within a 'natural' focus on learning outcomes justifying the extraction of data on performativity (Ball, 2000), facetiously mobilising a narrative of justice and equality. Biesta's centring of 'lifelong learning' within learnification calls to the

'limitless postponements' (Deleuze, 1992, p. 5) of the control societies highlighting the neoliberal system's logics of expansion where subjectivities can be constantly remodulated in service to capitalism. Moreover, the coloniality core to the workings of neoliberalism are preserved and intensified in its universalisation of the market as the means of structuring social life (Shamir, 2008), which concomitantly ties education as servile to the economy in the cultivation of human capital (Ball, 2016). This perpetuating coloniality is replete within learnification and its objectification of bodies to be intervened upon, restricted to commodities in a reinvigorated hierarchisation and categorisation of subjectivities essential to colonising neoliberal efficiencies (De Lissovoy, 2015; Shahjahan, 2011). Reading the synergies between Deleuzian control societies and Biesta's critique of learnification from a decolonial perspective reveals the systemic inequalities as deeply imbricated in a continuing coloniality of power which enunciates across all levels of education (Fúnez-Flores, 2024). More precisely, the references to data within these theories point to the colonial potential of datafication and its implications for individual and collective subjectivities within education. In the next section the coloniality of datafication is unpacked further.

(Data) colonialism and education: Enunciating (*sic.*) cartographies

There is an emerging body of scholarship in the field of critical data studies that has begun excavating the colonial logics inherent to datafication. Couldry and Mejias (2023, p. 787) propose the notion of data colonialism to foreground 'the continuous extraction of economic value from human life through data'. This is a useful position to the present discussion as the authors take a decolonial stance in their theorising situated within the broader conditions of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019). Building upon this work, I argue for the need to reawaken ourselves as an educational community towards the colonial potential within contemporary data practices in education, and particularly as they facilitate a new mode of governance and exercise of power (Couldry & Mejias, 2019, 2023). Decolonial theory explicates the contiguity of colonialism and capitalism (Wright, 2022), excoriating the centrality of inequitable racialised labour appropriation as the foundation of capitalist expansion (Issar, 2021). The perspective of data colonialism, in providing a reading of datafication through the historical lens of settler colonisation (Couldry & Mejias, 2019), elucidates the multivalence of coloniality as it perseveres in modern data-relations.

The coloniality inherent to contemporary data practices are readily grasped within the broader virtual realities of the internet, where users engage and are in turn monitored and tracked by various systems within a complex architecture structuring browsing preferences and targeted advertising. Here the extraction of data from a person's virtual interactions has deeply reminiscent colonial logics in what Van Dijck (2014) denotes as new form of 'life mining'. The coloniality of power is clear in the extraction, refinement, and redistribution (*via* algorithms) of value from data to produce a continuous cycle of consumerism (Ricaurte, 2019), as well as the neo-colonisation of the Global South reflected in the imposition of Western capitalist logic (Benyera, 2021). Moreover, the imbrication of a deep-seated scientism within the contemporary neoliberalised social policy assemblage (Jasanoff, 2004; Muller, 2021), with the advancement of data technologies has facilitated a 'naturalisation' of data-relations which stabilises this appropriation of social life through data extraction (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). These datafied landscapes may be said to operate on an underpinning 'numerical language of control' (Deleuze, 1992, p. 5) where the data extracted by corporations, being primed for advanced statistical processing and utilisation in broader architectures of exchange, are repurposed for further capital-driven subjugation. Importantly, from a Deleuzian reading, these codes not only elide the appropriation of one's personal data, but also by virtue of its 'raw' nature—implying the necessity for expert processing and interpretation—'mark access to information or reject it' (Deleuze, 1992, p. 5). This highlights two distinct functions of the coloniality of power within datafication; through the extraction of data and its justification.

Furthermore, the racialised logics of coloniality are demonstrated through the extreme concentration of data wealth to a specific Western demographic and the concomitant disenfranchisement of ethnic minorities through mechanisms of advanced data analytics. This has been amply demonstrated in the work of Virginia Eubanks and Safia Unoja Noble who demonstrate the inherent racial bias of data algorithms operating to govern a punitive form of poverty management and discrimination against formerly colonised peoples, namely through their insertion on the lower ends of welfare systems (Eubanks, 2019; Noble, 2018). The creation of differences and hierarchies through an ideology of justification is just as inherent to the modern coloniality of datafication as it was to historical settler colonialism. Whereas science was utilised to provide the justification for colonisation in the past, the evolved scientism of today, partly manifested through datafication, justifies the ostensible common sense of using data that is 'naturally available'. These logics are significant within the context of educational discourse and where the role of 'objective' data dominates decision making.

In animating the enunciation, facilitating the CMP, the role of knowledge and institutions are centred in modulating control (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), in this case facilitated through datafication. For education, the global reach of organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) fulfil such institutional roles in rhetorising the narrative of data-driven scientific education policy (Williamson & Piattoeva, 2019). The centrality of the OECD, and the data it produces, in bolstering the 'veil of objectivity' within data-scientific policy formulations elides a complex of sociotechnical governance, which coalesce to establish a new 'language' of education concerned with measurement and evaluation (Piattoeva, 2015). This new datafied policy science facilitates an intensified 'late neoliberal' rationale through the co-optation of economic behavioural psychologies, understandings, and logics (McGimpsey et al., 2017) operationalised to intervene and 'nudge' subjects into desired formulations (Bradbury et al., 2013). These technologies, when absorbed by the likes of the OECD, mark a colonial homogenising of educational imaginings (Shahjahan, 2016) ideologically framed around neoliberalism and exculpated through deficit-driven policy reformulation. These motivations to reform policy rely on the primacy of datafication, within learnification to establish educational 'crises', often based on national performance in standardised assessments. This reflects the same logics as those of historical settler colonialism that leveraged messages of deficit indigenous populations to justify 'civilising' missions (Smith, 2012), simultaneously controlling the mechanisms by which people can be (de)humanised. Furthermore, the essentiality of datafication to modern neoliberal coloniality lies in its scaffolding of smooth administration through 'objective' data-based decision making and justification (Shahjahan, 2011). Within this 'common sense' of neoliberal datafication, the socio-politically driven data landscape, which is anything but objective, scaffolds a multifaceted network governance that have been demonstrated to support political agendas naturalising acclaimed innate racial deficits in academic ability (Gillborn et al., 2022), thus reinvigorating the coloniality at the heart of the neoliberalisation of education.

The analytical frame provided by the reading of datafication in light of Deleuzian, Biestan, and Decolonial theories has demonstrated the colonial logics at the core of the datafied neoliberal milieu. However, in order to truly grasp the danger inherent to these ideologies, it is constructive to consider, what Biesta (2009) argues as lacking in learned contexts; the subjectification of educational stakeholders.

'Datafying the children'

In this section I use the conceptual analytic of 'datafying the children' to argue for the implications of datafication to issues of subjectification across three demographic levels of educational stakeholders: students, teachers and researchers. I use the term playfully to centre the polyvalence of datafication at work within the ideological apparatus of neoliberalised educational

policy science. The potential inflection of datafication upon processes of subjectification is only conceivable through data colonialism's extractivist tendencies, which recasts social knowledge as inputs to capitalism (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). The implications for student subjectivities are significant, an issue critiqued by Sefton-Green and Pangrazio (2022) in what they denote as the 'slow death of the educative subject'. Validly, they propose the divisions caused through a process of datafying the student, with statistical analysis and processing, results in them 'reduced to a point on a bell curve' in a continuous monopolisation of the space for self-reflection essential to existential growth (Sefton-Green & Pangrazio, 2022, p. 2078). The 'dividual' is stripped of all subjective complexity, represented as a 'data double' (Bradbury, 2019; Couldry & Mejias, 2019) where a non-somatic floating form of surveillance operates.

These observations render visible some of the implications of datafication for student subjectivities, but this falls short of situating these logics in the broader apparatus of the CMP. The particular form of subjectivising flows from datafication, as observed by Sefton-Green and Pangrazio (2022), fail to connect with the broader coloniality that seeks to control those deemed pliable to neoliberal capitalism *via* processes of (de)humanisation, as explicated in the previous section. Datafication, facilitated by the rapid advances in computing technologies, intensifies these processes that have always worked to subjugate those deemed anathema to Western capitalism (Couldry & Mejias, 2023; Ricaurte, 2019). Moreover, rather than merely monopolising an individual's capacity for self-reflection, the continuous and expansive invasion of social life by datafication, works to dissolve the space of the self, which as Roessler (2005) positions, is the location of private self-exploration essential to existential learnings. Through a continuing process of datafying students' existences, important within learnification, increasing control of student subjectivities are ceded to corporate interests (e.g., Google Classroom) and political actors. This is deceitfully hidden within a neoliberalised rhetoric promoting 'flexible' and 'personalised' learning through advanced data analytics that simultaneously elevates a particular 'ideal' subject and reinforces governance through self-responsibilisation (Houlden & Veletsianos, 2021) and 'nudging' (Bradbury et al., 2013). In this sense, datafication offers the means to reaffirm and intensify learnification, preserving the coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) through the mining and re-presentation of 'natural' learning/performance data, which constantly refers students to a 'norm' structuring Eurocentric white privilege (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Klein, 2017; Mills, 2022) and pushing other bodies out (Shahjahan, 2011). 'Datafying the children' not only bolsters learnification (Knox et al., 2020), but facilitates the coloniality of being through an ideological governance apparatus that strips students of complexity, treating them as homogenous data (Ball & Grimaldi, 2022) to be nudged into neoliberal subjectivities. However, this does not stop at the level of the student.

A decolonial analysis connects datafication as a component ideology within the larger coloniality of the neoliberal educational policy assemblage, and subsequently to subjectivities. Given that learnification within this reality desires improvement in learning outcomes (Biesta, 2022), the concomitant ethos of performativity it entails also affects teachers. As Bradbury (2019) has researched, the neoliberalised flows mobilising the 'schoolification' of early childhood education has resulted in teachers' professional subjectivities moving from a position of care to one of 'producing the right data' (p. 12). In these data-driven teacher subjectivities concern is directed towards the external surveillance facilitated by the increased testing and generation of data in early childhood contexts. Not only does this evince the performative culture of education and accountability but, as Roberts-Holmes (2015) has shown, it affects the subjectivities of teachers through their reconceptualization of 'good teaching' to equate to 'good data'. This datafying of students would therefore raise the stakes for Biesta's caution about the over promotion of 'qualification' to the detriment of 'subjectification'. Moreover, the results of such research demonstrate the subjectivising forces of datafication in a (neo)colonisation of teacher identities.

The hopeful picture from this research, such as Alice Bradbury's, is the seeming frustration of teachers with the data-driven performative culture promoted by policy makers that showcases

a recalcitrant professional identity as educators. However, and in relation to the third demographic where this datafication of the children infiltrates, the colonial narrative asserting the naturalness of which data appears across educational contexts, and within the world coloured by scientism, reflects a potential intrusion on the subjectivities of educational researchers. Visualising the mutual relations of neoliberalism, learnification and datafication as the present decolonial stance does, signals the deeply connected logics of scientism with the ‘obfuscating numericism’ (Moore et al., 2011, p. 509) of neoliberal governance. Within these socio-political ideologies data can be wielded as objective bases for decision making and reform only because neoliberalism and its inherent colonial scientism have succeeded in colonising common sense (De Lissovoy, 2015; Hardt & Negri, 2009). This elides the real nature of ‘objectivity’ within the evidence-based narratives of datafied education, which more accurately reflects socially constructed phenomena among a complex network of actors, institutions, knowledge and politics (Williamson & Piattoeva, 2019). This not only forefronts the potential for politically motivated discourse suppressing concerns around racial equality in education (cf. Gillborn et al., 2018), but signals the urgency in stressing the sociopolitical bases of datafication itself. In relation to the educational researcher, the imbrication of neoliberal coloniality in the over-psychologised model of childhood and adolescence (Burman, 2012) promoted by the likes of the OECD has ushered in a neo-behaviourist conceptualisation of education (Knox et al., 2020). This situates datafication’s remapping of childhood (also adolescence and adulthood) through the structure of Western psychology, naively conceived—and self-promoted—as the most objective social science (Williamson & Piattoeva, 2019). This reflects the rapid ushering in of scientific logics across the field of educational scholarships in the colonisation of the field by neoliberalised performative reforms (see Baez & Boyles, 2009). ‘Datafying the children’ therefore brings into focus the potential subjectivising consequences for the researcher, many of whom reside in the increasing neoliberalised higher education network (Acker & Wagner, 2019), with its tenor of meritocracy fixated on metricised ‘research outputs’ (Mahon & Henry, 2022). Consequently, an educational researcher may become data-driven and acquiescent to the datafication movement, further naturalising this scientific enunciation that governs upon ‘dividualised’ subjectivities. The logics of coloniality that sustain the neoliberal ideology have to some extent always operated on the researcher with the inherent ties between government funding and research. The intensification of datafied imaginaries within education is perhaps most salient currently in the funding programmes that have emerged⁴ supporting the reanalysis of ‘Big Data’ produced from organisations such as the OECD. While it is certainly possible for a researcher to use the data openly available to answer meaningful questions and even, through a critical approach, challenge inequities elided in data (Delahunty, 2023), there is potential for it to further naturalise the instrumental ‘what works’ agenda in service of learned performances.

Concluding remarks

Drawing on theories from Deleuze and Biesta animated through a Decolonial reading, I have excavated the inherent coloniality within the forces of datafication. The work has considered how the control society is emboldened by data-driven rationalities at the heart of learnification, which in ‘dividualising’ students, dehumanises their representation in the broader educational policy assemblage. As a rejoinder to Sefton-Green and Pangrazio (2022), I offered the analytic of ‘datafying the children’ to consider potential means by which datafication is implicated in the neoliberal subjectivation of students, teachers and educational researchers. For students in particular, the concerns with the manner datafication dissolves the space of self is significant from an ethical pedagogical perspective. Moreover, this endangers the potential resistances possible within a decolonial position of resistance by veiling the enunciation of neoliberal datafication even further. Hommi Bhabba’s concept of ‘Hybridity’, brings this conclusion into full view. Bhabba (1994) defines ‘Hybridity’ as a means of resisting authority and colonial assimilation; a ‘strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal’ (p.159). This space

articulates a 'terrain for elaborating strategies of self-hood' (*ibid*, p.2). As this paper has argued, datafication threatens this space of the self, therefore potential eroding this resistive potentiality. This would therefore imply the potential for the evolution of coloniality within the modern datafied educational policy assemblage, further threatening democratic freedoms.

This is not intended to be an epitaphic conclusion but to encourage our community to re-establish the politicalness of education among discursive, political, spatial, and temporal materialisms and recentre the need for resistance to the potential for increased coloniality of social life, potentially reconnecting to the politics of educational refusal through the cultivation of critical data literacies.

Notes

1. Here I use the term 'discourse' most broadly encompassing multiple aspects of educational considerations rather than specific discourses. For example, discourse in this context could relate to the mainstream political narratives surrounding national curricular reform or could potentially relate to some of the larger agendas dominating educational scholarship such as the emerging scientific and neo-positivistic obsession with 'psychologised' frameworks for educational research (e.g. arguments for replication studies).
2. 'Enunciation' is used in several instances throughout the article and calls primarily to Walter Mignolo's delineation of this concept as the larger framework housing the knowledge systems used to structure and justify the Colonial Matrix of Power. See Mignolo and Walsh (2018) for a thorough treatment of this.
3. In this article, while I attempt to sketch brief divergences between notions of subjectivity in Biesta and Foucault, I wish to emphasise that this is an incomplete analysis, due to space requirements in the present contribution. I see value in Biesta's attempt to resist the narrowing of educational purpose through his theorising of subjectification, however, as a critical psychologist I also see that this theory falls short of addressing the politics of subjectification in the context of the psy-complex infused discourses of authoritarian neoliberalism (cf. Delahunty, 2024). I hope to pick this up in future work.
4. For example at the time of writing the American Educational Research Association in partnership with the National Science Foundation in the United States, have opened a funding call that incentivises researchers to use published data and 'emphasises the advanced statistical analysis of [these] data sets' (AERA, 2023, n.p).

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