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Capitalism and Digital Labour
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This is a copy of the accepted author manuscript of the following article: Fuchs, Christian 2018. Capitalism, Patriarchy, Slavery, and Racism in the Age of Digital Capitalism and Digital Labour, *Critical Sociology*, 44 (4-5), pp. 677-702. The final definitive version is available from the publisher Sage at:

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0896920517691108>

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Capitalism, Patriarchy, Slavery, and Racism in the Age of Digital Capitalism and Digital Labour

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Accepted manuscript

Abstract

This paper asks: How can understanding the relationship of exploitation and oppression inform the study of digital labour and digital capitalism? It combines the analysis of capitalism, patriarchy, slavery, and racism in order to analyse digital labour. The approach taken also engages with a generalisation of David Roediger's wages of whiteness-approach, Marxist feminism, Angela Davis's Marxist black feminism, Rosa Luxemburg, Kylie Jarrett's concept of the digital housewife, Jack Qiu's notion of iSlavery, Eileen Meehan's concept of the gendered audience commodity, and Carter Wilson and Audrey Smedley's historical analyses of racism and class. The article presents a typology of differences and commonalities between wage-labour, slave-labour, reproductive labour, and Facebook labour. It shows that the digital data commodity is both gendered and racialised. The paper analyses how class, patriarchy, slavery, and racism overgrasp into each other in the realm of digital capitalism. It also introduces the notions of the organic composition of labour and the rate of reproductive labour and shows based on example data how to calculate these ratios that provide insights into the reality of unpaid labour in capitalism.

Keywords: digital media, digital labour, digital capitalism, patriarchy, racism, digital housewife, housework, organic composition of labour, rate of reproductive labour, Marxist feminism, socialist feminism, Angela Davis, David Roediger, Kylie Jarrett, Jack Qiu, Eileen Meehan, Maria Mies, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, Claudia von Werlhof, Rosa Luxemburg

1. Introduction

This paper asks: How can understanding the relationship of exploitation and oppression inform the study of digital capitalism? For answering this question, the paper re-visits and updates the discussion of how capitalism, patriarchy and racism are connected.

One important question that arises in this context is how the economic and the non-economic are related to each other. This question is not just of theoretical relevance, but also matters politically. It focuses on how class politics that struggle for re-distribution of resources and identity politics that struggle for the recognition of oppressed identities are related (Fraser and Honneth, 2003). Reductionist politics privilege either class or identity politics, whereas dualist politics say that both realms and demands are important without relating them (Fuchs, 2011: section 2.3).

In Marxist feminism, patriarchy has not just been seen as a form of sexist oppression, but as the exploitation of houseworkers in capitalism. Given that in the world of digital capitalism, new unpaid forms of labour (Fuchs, 2014; Lambert, 2015), such as the use of Facebook or crowdsourced labour, have emerged, the question arises: What can we learn from studies of the relationship of exploitation and oppression that helps us to better understand unpaid digital labour?

The media's commodity has a peculiar character because information is not used up in consumption and it is difficult to exclude others from its use and copying. The labour involved in producing media therefore also takes on peculiar forms. Targeted advertising is a very important capital accumulation model in the realm of Internet capitalism (Fuchs, 2017). Dallas Smythe (1977) and Sut Jhally (1987) have argued that not media workers, but audiences produce the advertising-funded media's commodity. The access to such media is provided as a gift to the users and the audience's attention is sold as commodity to advertisers. Smythe therefore speaks of audience labour and the audience commodity. In the context of targeted-advertising based capital accumulation on social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Google, we find user-labour that produces a data commodity and attention commodity (Fuchs, 2014, 2015, 2017). Based on constant surveillance and big data analytics, online advertising is personalised and interest-based (ibid.). Such user labour is yet another form of unpaid labour in capitalism. Therefore the question arises what the role of unpaid labour is in the capitalist mode of production, what types there are, and what their commonalities and differences are.

Section 2 focuses on the relationship of housework and digital labour. Section 3 analyses the relationship of racism, slavery and digital labour. Section 4 generalises the discussion and provides a typology that outlines the commonalities and differences of wage-labour, slave labour, housework, and users' digital labour. Section 5 draws some conclusions.

2. Housework and Digital Labour

The task of this section is to explore commonalities and differences between housework and users' digital labour. This will be done in two steps: Section 2.1. re-visits the debate on reproductive labour and identifies two basic positions: The first holds that reproductive labour is productive labour, the second one that reproductive labour is excluded from productive labour. Especially the first position is relevant in the digital age. Based on this discussion, section 2.2. updates debates about reproductive labour by engaging with the notion of digital housework that was introduced by the Marxist-feminist scholar Kylie Jarrett (2016).

2.1. The Debate on Housework and Reproductive Labour

Women have historically carried out the dominant part of reproductive labour, such as child-rearing, care, education, cooking, laundry,

shopping, cleaning, etc. In contemporary capitalism, many more women are active in the paid labour force than 100 or 200 years ago, but housework is still predominantly women's matter, which creates multiple responsibilities and less free time for them.

Angela Davis shows that in the USA, women slaves' labour was different than white women's labour. Domestic work was the only labour that was not under the slave-master's control (1983: 17). There was relative equality in the slaves' quarters, men and women worked together (1983: 18). Black women's lives were characterised by "hard work with their men, equality within the family, resistance, floggings and rape" (1983: 27). In 2014, white US women's labour force participation rate was 56.7%, whereas it was 59.2% for black women (BLS 2014: table 4). In 1972, the respective rates were 43.2% and 48.7% (BLS 2014: table 4). Black American women are to a higher degree both wage- and reproductive-workers than white women. The share of women who are doubly exploited by capital as both wage-workers and houseworkers is larger among blacks than among whites in the USA.

There are two basic positions within socialist feminism on the question whether housework is a form of productive labour or not. The *first position* can for example be found in Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (1973) *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community*. Dalla Costa and James (1973: 30-31) criticise that "orthodox Marxism" often assumes that women outside of wage-labour "are also outside of social productivity" and that "women in domestic labor are not productive". Such assumptions would deny "women's potential *social power*" (6). Domestic labour "produces not merely use values, but is essential to the production of surplus value" (31). It produces a commodity "unique to capitalism: the living human being – 'the labourer himself'" (6). The family would not be a superstructure, but a realm of production (33), in which houseworkers perform "social services which capitalist organization transforms into privatized activity, putting them on the backs of housewives" (31).

Leopoldina Fortunati (1995) stresses that reproductive labour is productive labour; "it produces and reproduces the individual as a commodity" (70) by "producing and reproducing labor-power" (70) and "the use-value of labor-power" (69). Maria Mies (1986: 37) points out that women face a threefold form of exploitation: "they are exploited [...] by men and they are exploited as housewives by capital. If they are wage-workers they are also exploited as wage-workers".

The *second position* argues that domestic labour is excluded from productive labour and thereby ideologically rendered inferior. Roswitha Scholz (2000, 2014) formulated this assumption in the value-dissociation hypothesis (*Wertabspaltungsthese*). Abstract labour would only be possible by dissociating the sphere of reproductive labour, emotions, and sensuality: "The value-dissociation hypothesis claims [...] a 'dissociation' of the feminine, housework etc from value, abstract labour and the related forms of rationality that attributes specific qualities such as sensuality,

emotionality etc that are connoted as female to women; the man in contrast stands for intellectual power, strength of character, courage, etc. The man was under modern development equated with culture, the woman with nature” (Scholz, 2000: 9, translation from German¹).

The Endnotes Collective’s (2013) argument is comparable to the one made by Scholz: The “activity of turning the raw materials equivalent to the wage into labour-power takes place *in a separate sphere from the production and circulation of values*. These necessary non-labour activities do not produce value, not because of their concrete characteristics, but rather, because they take place in a sphere of the capitalist mode of production which is not directly mediated by the form of value. [...] There must be an exterior to value in order for value to exist. Similarly, for labour to exist and serve as the measure of value, there must be an exterior to labour (we will return to this in part two). While the autonomist feminists would conclude that every activity which reproduces labour-power produces value, we would say that, for labour-power to have a value, some of these activities have to be cut off or dissociated from the sphere of value production”.

Angela Davis shares the second position. For her, housework is dissociated from wage-labour. “Within capitalism, household labor, generating only the value of utility, is no longer related to the productive apparatus. [...] women experience a double inferiority: They are first prohibited, by virtue of their family standing, from consistently and equally reaching the point of production. Secondly, the labor they continue to monopolize does not measure up to the characteristic labor of capitalist society” (Davis 1977: 176). Davis speaks of the “labor of utility as opposed to that of exchange” (176) and writes that housework is not abstract labour (177). There is “a fundamental *structural* separation between the domestic home economy and the profit-oriented economy of capitalism. Since housework does not generate profit, domestic labor was naturally defined as an inferior form of work as compared to capitalist wage labor” (1983: 228). There is a “structural separation of the public economy of capitalism and the private economy of the home” (229).

One argument against the second position can be found in Marx’s works. He argues that the capitalist division of labour resulted in the emergence of the collective labourer (*Gesamtarbeiter*). “In order to work productively, it is no longer necessary for the individual himself to put his hand to the object; it is sufficient for him to be an organ of the collective labourer, and to perform any of its subordinate functions” (Marx 1867: 643-644). This means that in a software company, not just the software engineers who

¹ German original: „Die Wert-Abspaltungsthese behauptet nun [...] eine ‚Abspaltung‘ des Weiblichen, der Hausarbeit etc. vom Wert, von der abstrakten Arbeit und den damit zusammenhängenden Rationalitätsformen, wobei bestimmte weiblich konnotierte Eigenschaften wie Sinnlichkeit, Emotionalität usw. der Frau zugeschrieben werden; der Mann hingegen steht etwa für Verstandeskraft, charakterliche Stärke, Mut usw. Der Mann wurde in der modernen Entwicklung mit Kultur, die Frau mit Natur gleichgesetzt“ (Scholz, 2000: 9).

produce the software commodity, are productive workers, but also the secretaries, cleaners, janitors, accountants, marketers, etc. Productive labour produces surplus-value, "it must appear in surplus produce, i.e. an *additional increment of a commodity* on behalf of the monopolizer of the means of labour, the capitalist" (1039). The value of labour-power is the time that it takes to reproduce it. "The value of labour-power is determined, as in the case of every other commodity, by the labour-time necessary for the production, and consequently also the reproduction, of this specific article. [...] the value of labour-power is the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of its owner" (274).

Angela Davis is critical of the Wages for Housework-movement and its theoretical foundations. "The demand that housewives be paid is based on the assumption that they produce a commodity as important and as valuable as the commodities their husbands produce on the job" (Davis, 1983: 233-234). Davis says it cannot be denied that houseworkers' "procreative, child-rearing and housekeeping roles make it possible for their family members to work – to exchange their labor-power for wages" (1983: 234). But houseworkers would be structurally separated from the capitalist production process. So Davis tends to share the value dissociation hypothesis. Housework "cannot be defined as an integral component of capitalist production. It is, rather, related to production as a *precondition*. The employer is not concerned in the least about the way labor-power is produced and sustained, he is only concerned about its availability and its ability to generate profit. In other words, the capitalist production process presupposes the existence of a body of exploitable workers" (1983: 234). Wages for housework would not aim at abolishing housework, but could rather reify and keep women tied to the home. The demand would also not question wage-labour as integral part of capitalism. "The Wages for Housework Movement discourages women from seeking outside jobs" (239). "In the United States, women of color – and especially Black women – have been receiving wages for housework for untold decades. [...] Cleaning women, domestic workers, maids – these are the women who know better than anyone else what it means to receive wages for housework" (237). Davis demands the "abolition of housework" and says that "it may well be true that 'slavery to an assembly line' is not in itself 'liberation from the kitchen sink', but the assembly line is doubtlessly the most powerful incentive for women to press for the elimination of their age-old domestic slavery" (243).

Davis is particularly critical of Dalla Costa and James' (1973: 33) formulation that "[s]lavery to an assembly line is not a liberation from slavery to a kitchen sink" (33). The two socialist feminists argue that wage-labour would not mean the liberation of houseworkers, but another form of slavery: "[W]omen are the slaves of wage slaves" (43). Dalla Costa and James do not uncritically embrace the demand of wages for housework. They say on the one hand that such a demand risks "to entrench the condition of institutionalized slavery which is produced within the condition of housework" (34), but argue on the other hand that

practically speaking this demand also helped to radicalise and unify the socialist-feminist movement in Italy (52-53: footnote 16).

Silvia Federici's (1975) *Wages against Housework*-manifesto argues that the "unwaged condition of housework has been the most powerful weapon in reinforcing the common assumption that *housework is not work*" (2). "To say that we want money for housework is the first step towards refusing to do it, because the demand for a wage makes our work visible, which is the most indispensable condition to begin to struggle against it [...] To say that we want wages for housework is to expose the fact that housework is already money for capital" (5). The lack of a wage for housework has "also been the primary cause of our [houseworkers'] weakness in the wage labor market" (Federici, 2012: 34). The invisibility of housework is also sustained by the fact that it is not included in the calculation of the GDP (Federici, 2012: 42). The demand of wages for housework "exposed the enormous amount of unpaid labor that goes on unchallenged and unseen in this society" (Federici, 2012: 56). Federici's goal is both the abolishment of wage-labour and housework, which is a perspective that Davis shares. They differ on the question whether a wage for housework is a feasible political demand or not.

The point is to avoid two extremes, namely to focus political demands and action either solely on the waged workplace or the household. Given that both realms are interlinked, the struggle for the abolishment of wage-labour and housework should also be connected. Demanding wages for housework does not automatically exclude demanding equal pay for equal work. The point is that higher wages in any case weaken capital's power and to find ways of how to strengthen the autonomy and power of the working class, which includes the power of houseworkers.

A guaranteed basic income funded by capital taxation that guarantees a living-wage can both empower wage-workers and houseworkers: Wage-workers can refuse to take on jobs that are in any respect precarious, which empowers their position vis-à-vis capital. Houseworkers are strengthened because a basic income that they receive individually makes them independent from wage-workers in the same household and allows them more social and financial autonomy. The total effect of such a version of the basic income guarantee on the labour-capital relationship would be redistribution from capital to labour that strengthens labour's autonomy vis-à-vis capital. Neither capital nor wage-labour nor housework would thereby automatically cease to exist, but resources, time and spaces that challenge and transcend capitalism could thereby be easier created.

The main result of this discussion is that the position that reproductive labour is productive labour is feasible. Section 2.2 builds on this discussion and connects it to the notion of users' unpaid digital labour as one specific form of reproductive labour.

2.2. Digital Housework and Reproductive Labour

The crucial difference in the analysis of different forms of labour is the one between wage-labour and unwaged labour. Slave-labour, reproductive labour and unpaid Facebook labour have in common that they are unwaged, but by being integrated into capitalist society nonetheless create surplus-value. They are therefore productive labour. Not all online activities are labour. So for example listening to music on Spotify based on a monthly subscription is advertising-free. The consumers do not create, but consume a commodity. Not all digital labour is unpaid. So for example gold farmers on World of Warcraft or online freelancers tend to conduct their labour via the Internet and to produce digital outputs, but are mostly paid. In this section, we focus on Facebook usage when speaking of digital labour.

Kylie Jarrett (2016) uses the notion of the digital housewife for pointing out parallels between unpaid online labour and houseworkers' domestic, reproductive labour. She argues that the social worker has not emerged in contemporary capitalism, but has in the form of houseworkers always been an essential part of surplus-value production in capitalism. Parallels between housework and Facebook labour include that both are unwaged and produce two use-values, of which only one is a commodity (wage-labour in the case of the houseworker, data in the case of the Facebook worker). Affects and social relations form the second use-value. The "Digital Housewife can have real friends on Facebook" (104). Jarrett argues that both the houseworker and the Facebook worker both produce alienable and inalienable objects (123). The first are "inalienable use-values such as pleasure, social solidarity and the general intellect" (98). "Consumer labour is akin to domestic labour not only because it is unpaid and occurs outside of formal factory walls in what is ostensibly free time. It is also akin to it because it is a site of social reproduction: a site for the making and re-making of the social, affective, ideological and psychological states of being that (may) accord with appropriate capitalist subjectivities" (71). Digital housewives "express themselves, their opinions and generate social solidarity with others in commercial digital media while, at the same time, adding economic value to those sites" (4).

Nancy Fraser (1989: 116) argues that childrearing is a dual aspect activity, at the same time an activity of material reproduction and symbolic reproduction, economic and cultural. One must caution in this respect that the symbolic and cultural realms are not immaterial because materiality in society that humans socially produce results. So it is better to speak of physical reproduction. Fraser (1989: 116) says that all work, including industrial food production and software engineering, reproduce social identities and physical existence. The difference is that both in reproductive labour and Facebook labour humans directly produce two use-values, whereas in software engineering and industrial food production conducted as paid jobs, there is one main use-value and sustained social relations between colleagues may or may not result as

an indirect by-product of the labour process. Humans have a family and use Facebook for sustaining their social relations, whereas they have to have a paid job in order to earn money to be able to survive.

One should stress that the two use-values (created by both reproductive labour and Facebook labour) are not independent. Social relations and affects are key resources for the reproduction of labour-power in the case of housework and the creation of personal relations data in the case of Facebook. Social relations are means of subsistence for houseworkers and Facebook workers.

Both housework and Facebook labour have a relation to commodity consumption: Purchased consumer goods are part of the goods that housework transforms into means of subsistence that sustain life and labour-power. In consumer capitalism, consumers learn about the existence of particular commodities via advertisements by looking at shelves in a shop. Audience labour and user labour generate attention and data that are used for presenting and targeting ads and selling commodities. Audience labour and commercial digital labour are therefore that part of reproductive labour that generates commodities that help advertisers to make profits so that consumer goods are sold and consumed. Housework transforms consumer goods into means of subsistence that enable survival and the saleability of labour-power.

Marx argues that capital has aspects of living and dead labour. He therefore introduces the distinction between variable and constant capital. Both are key factors in the capitalist production process, but it is only living labour that creates value. The organic composition of capital is the relationship of constant to variable capital: "As value, it is determined by the proportion in which it is divided into constant capital, or the value of the means of production, and variable capital, or the value of labour-power, the sum total of wages" (Marx, 1867: 762). Marx describes a tendency of the organic composition of capital to rise that is an expression of the automation and technification of capitalism, by which the capitalist class tries to replace labour by technology. To offset increasing rises of costs for constant capital, capital tends to be forced to also increase the exploitation of unpaid labour. Marx (1867: chapter 9) introduced for this purpose the rate of surplus-labour. It is the ratio of profit to wages. It is typically calculated at the level of monetary prices and not labour-time and thereby leaves out forms of unremunerated labour such as reproductive labour. It operates in respect to waged labour. The organic composition of labour is a new complementary variable that operates at the level of labour time. It calculates the relationship of the total of unpaid labour hours to paid labour hours. Unpaid labour time includes both unwaged labour time and surplus-labour time in waged labour.

Table 1 provides approximations for what can be termed the organic composition of labour that can be calculated as the ratio of unpaid labour-time (including both reproductive labour-time and wage labour's surplus-

labour-time) in an economy over the time period of one year. The data shows that in the USA, the organic composition of labour is around 5.8. This means that per waged hour, there are 5.8 hours of unpaid labour. American capital only pays for one in seven labour hours. The rate of reproductive labour measures the share of both components of unpaid labour (see table 1). It indicates that in the USA, reproductive labour accounts for around 83.7*% of all unpaid labour time and wage-labour's surplus-labour-time for about 16.3%.

The total production time includes the reproductive labour time that reproduces the labour-power as a commodity. Reproductive labour is productive because it is surplus-labour time unremunerated by capital. Capital not just exploits wage-labour, but also the reproductive labour required for the existence and reproduction of labour-power. Based on Marx's analysis, we can say that the exploitation of labour entails not a dual separation, but a dialectic of reproductive labour and wage-labour.

Table 2 presents further estimates. It indicates that on average, for each paid hour of labour, there are 5.8 hours of unpaid labour. I call the ratio of unpaid to paid labour time the organic composition of labour. Unpaid labour includes both unpaid reproduction labour as well as wage-labour's surplus-labour time.

If reproductive labour were paid at the average wage, then profits would dwindle and capitalism would not be able to survive. This fact shows on the one hand the importance of reproductive labour in capitalism. On the other hand is also indicates capitalism's inherent drive and need to create milieus of unpaid labour in order to survive. Another measure is the rate of reproductive labour: It measures the ratio between unpaid reproductive labour-time and wage labour's surplus-labour time. For the analysed data, the rate of reproductive labour is 5.14, which means that reproductive labour time in the total economy is 5.14 times as large as wage-labour's surplus-labour-time.

Table 1 indicates that on average each person in the USA conducts 44.53 hours reproductive labour per week. Commercial media use accounts for 38.75% of this time, which shows that advertising dominates a very significant share of our lifetime. In 2015, global advertising revenue accounted was £308bn (Ofcom 2016: figure 1.21). Television advertising amounted to a total of £106bn (34.4%), online advertising to a total of £102bn (33.1%) (ibid.). So TV and the Internet are the two most profitable realms of advertising. At the level of human activities, this circumstance is based on the fact that we spend large amounts of our free time watching television and using social media: On average, Americans watch 19.5 hours television per week and spend 12.4 hours on social media (see table 1). A significant share of reproductive labour is television audience labour and social media-digital labour.

Variable	Average number of hours per week	US Census Bureau, American Time Use Survey 2015
Grooming	4.83	US Census Bureau, American Time Use Survey 2015
Health-related self care	0.70	US Census Bureau, American Time Use Survey 2015
Housework	3.99	US Census Bureau, American Time Use Survey 2015
Food preparation and cleanup	4.20	US Census Bureau, American Time Use Survey 2015
Lawn and garden care	1.40	US Census Bureau, American Time Use Survey 2015
Household management	0.91	US Census Bureau, American Time Use Survey 2015
Interior maintenance, repair, and decoration	0.42	US Census Bureau, American Time Use Survey 2015
Exterior maintenance, repair, and decoration	0.42	US Census Bureau, American Time Use Survey 2015
Vehicles	0.04	US Census Bureau, American Time Use Survey 2015
Appliances, tools, and toys	0.14	US Census Bureau, American Time Use Survey 2015
Travel related to household activities	0.35	US Census Bureau, American Time Use Survey 2015
Consumer goods purchases	2.52	US Census Bureau, American Time Use Survey 2015
Medical and care services	0.35	US Census Bureau, American Time Use Survey 2015
Personal care services	0.14	US Census Bureau, American Time Use Survey 2015
Travel related to purchasing goods and services	1.96	US Census Bureau, American Time Use Survey 2015
Caring for and helping household members	3.57	US Census Bureau, American Time Use Survey 2015
Caring for and helping nonhousehold members	1.33	
Use of commercial TV and commercial social media	17.26	US Census Bureau, American Time Use Survey 2015
Watching television	19.46	2016 data, statista.com
Being online	2.18	http://time.com/96303/tv-commercials-increasing/
Watching ads (25% of watching time)	4.87	GlobalWebIndex, http://www.globalwebindex.net/hubfs/Reports/GWISocialReport-Q32015Summary.pdf

Using commercial social media	12.39	
Average reproductive labour time per week per person	44.53	
Percentage share of commercial media use in reproductive labour time	38.75%	

Table 1: Reproductive labour in the USA

Variable	Value	Data source
Average reproductive labour hours per year per person	2315.3	US Census Bureau
Average total annual reproductive labour time in the USA	578,878,251,900	578.9 billion unwaged hours per year
US population aged 15 or over (2013)	250,023,000	OECD Stats
Average annual hours worked (2010)	1,778	OECD Stats
Full time equivalents of totally economically population (2010)	130,602,000	
Total annual hours worked (2010)	232,210,356,000	OECD Stats
Total wages and salaries in US\$ (2010)	6,417,482,000,000	OECD Stats
Value added at current prices, US\$ (2010)	14,526,547,000,000	OECD Stats
Gross fixed capital formation, US\$ (2010)	2,061,800,000,000	
Profits, US\$ (2010)	6,047,265,000,000	
Monetary rate of surplus-value	0.942	
Total annual hours of wage-workers' surplus-labour	112,656,723,676	= 48.5% of total annual hours worked by wage-labourer
Total annual hours of wage-workers' necessary labour	119,553,632,324	= 51.4% of total annual hours worked by wage-labourer
MELT in US\$ (2010): Monetary expression of labour time (=profit created per paid working hour)	26.04	
Average hourly wage/salary (2010), US\$	27.64	

Monetary value of unpaid reproductive labour-time (calculated at average hourly wage)	15,998,170,046,127	
Organic composition of labour (relationship of unpaid/paid labour time)	5.78	$\text{OCL} = (\text{Unpaid reproductive labour time} + \text{Surplus wage-labour time}) / \text{Paid labour-time} = (578,878,251,900 + 112,656,723,676) / 119,553,632,324$
Rate of reproductive labour	5.14	$\text{RRL} = \text{unpaid reproductive labour-time} / \text{wage-labour's surplus-labour-time} = 578,878,251,900 / 112,656,723,676$

Table 2: Reproductive labour in the USA

A very important part of housework is made up by household activities such as housework, food preparation, cleaning, lawn and garden care, and household management. According to statistics², US women in 2015 spent on average 48 minutes more time on such activities than men (men: 1.43 hours per day, women: 2.23). Another important activity is caring and helping others. Whereas US men spent 0.47 hours per day on caring and helping others, the amount was 0.91 hours for women. Shopping took up 0.6 hours per day for men and 0.88 hours for women. Taking the averages of these three types of activities allows us to estimate that US women tend to conduct on average 60% of reproductive labour and men 40%. Reproductive labour is both gendered and racialised: It is predominantly a realm of women. And in the case of paid reproductive labour, low-paid migrant workers and workers of colour form a proportionally very large share of the workforce. Capitalism is inherently connected to patriarchy and racism. The next section further explores this connection in the context of digital labour.

3. Slavery and Racism in the Age of Digital Labour

Capitalism is not just connected to patriarchy, but also to racism. When analysing digital capitalism, it is therefore also important to have a look at what forms racism takes on in respect to digital media. This section explores this topic in two steps. Section 3.1. re-visits debates on the connection of capitalism and racism. Section 3.2. builds on this discussion and discusses aspects of racism in the context of digital labour.

3.1. Capitalism and Racism

In the USA, the enslavement of people of colour was the most important historical expression of racism. Although slavery was abolished, racism continued to exist in ideological, political and economic forms of exclusion, discrimination and exploitation.

Audrey Smedley (1998) argues that before the rise of capitalism, kinship, occupation, gender and social position were the crucial feature of society that shaped connectedness and identities. In the Middle Ages, religion emerged as another important marker of identity. “What was absent from these different forms of human identity is what we today would perceive as classifications into ‘racial’ groups, that is, the organization of all peoples into a limited number of unequal or ranked categories theoretically based on differences in their biophysical trait” (693). Slavery as class phenomenon was in ancient and feudal society hardly based on racism, which is why slavery is older than racism. According to Smedley, racism emerged with European colonialism in America, English colonialism in Ireland and African slave trade in the 16th century. “‘Race’

² Data source: <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/atus.t01.htm>, accessed on October 29, 2016.

developed in the minds of some Europeans as a way to rationalize the conquest and brutal treatment of Native American populations, and especially the retention and perpetuation of slavery for imported Africans” (Smedely, 1998: 694). The implication of Smedely’s analysis is that there are indications that racism and imperialism have been inherently linked. Racism has provided not just the opportunity for ideological feelings of superiority, but also opportunities for justifying exploitation. Modern slavery has to a significant degree been racist slavery.

Angelis Davis acknowledges the importance of labour and capitalism in the analysis of oppression. Her contribution to *The Black Feminist Reader* (James and Sharpley-Whiting, 2000) is the only one of ten chapters that foregrounds the importance of both labour and capitalism for understanding racism and patriarchy and vice versa.

Davis is interested in the role of black women in American slavery and contemporary capitalism. Black women slaves experienced racism by being turned into slaves because of their skin colour. Slave-masters oppressed them as women by raping them. And they were exploited as unpaid workers. The unity of their oppression and exploitation is that they were treated as completely unfree beings, as beings without any rights, who were exploited, oppressed, raped, and killed by slave-masters as they pleased.

Davis (1977: 183) argues that black women worked both outside the home for the slave-master and inside the home, so that they were not, as many white women of the time, defined by the household alone. Slaves were treated as “inorganic conditions of production” (Davis, 1977: 171), as means of production, tools and things: “The slave system defined Black people as chattel” (Davis, 1983: 5).

The majority of slave women were just like slave men field workers (Davis, 1983: 5). “The slave-holding class expressed its drive for profit by seeking the maximum extraction of surplus labor in utter disregard to the age or sex of the slave” (1977: 171). Female slaves had to work just like men and were in addition raped by white masters and seen as machines that produce new slaves. “[W]hen it is as profitable to exploit them as if they were men, they were regarded, in effect, as genderless, but when they could be exploited, punished and repressed in ways suited only for women, they were locked into their exclusive female roles. [...] They were ‘breeders’ – animals, whose monetary value could be precisely calculated in terms of their ability to multiply their numbers. [...] Rape, in act, was an uncamouflaged expression of the slaveholder’s economic mastery and the overseer’s control over Black women as workers ” (1983: 6-7).

Slavery is the ultimate form of alienation and fetishism: Reification and alienation means for slaves that they just like a pure thing have no rights at all. They are robbed of their humanity, which makes them targets of limitless exploitation and domination. Women slaves can also be subject

to rape and theft of the children they give birth to, and can be forced to become slave-bearing machines.

After the American Civil War, the United States formally abolished slavery in 1865. But this did by no way mean that equality was established. Up until today, black Americans face discriminatory forms of domination and expression. As the Black Lives Matters-movement has shown, one the most extreme racist form is that blacks are much more likely to be killed by state power than whites, either in the form of police killings or the death penalty.

Carter Wilson (1996) argues that racism has economic, political and cultural dimensions. “[R]acial oppression is sustained within an exploitative and oppressive economic structure. This structure shapes the formation of a racist culture that functions to reinforce patterns of racial oppression. The state, operating within this economic and cultural context, generally supports and legitimizes oppressive relations” (16). “Whereas racial oppression is grounded in oppressive and exploitative economic arrangements and maintained by the state, culture plays a role in sustaining racism. That is, culture structures the way people think about and behave toward race in ways that perpetuate racial oppression” (24).

Wilson shows that in America, racism took in North America subsequently took on the forms of the slave mode of production and dominative racism (1787-1865), debt peonage and dominative aversive racism (1865-1965), and meta-racism (since 1970). Forms of aversive racism continue to exist, especially racial discrimination in the labour market, urban racial segregation, and housing segregation. Affirmative action programmes brought some improvements. Advanced capitalism features the increasing importance of knowledge and service work, financial capital, capital export, monopolisation, and automation. Capital mobility and global communications extended the international division of labour. Wilson argues that in advanced capitalism high black poverty in urban centres is the most distinctive feature of racism in the USA. The black middle class was undermined. Meta-racism has been accompanied by particular racist images: “Today’s images include those of the black under- class: crazed, uncontrollable, powerful, violent, drug-addicted black men; promiscuous black women; and black welfare queens” (224).

Angela Davis (1983: 87-88) cites data from the 1890 US census that shows that 38.7% of Black women employees worked in agriculture, 30.8% in domestic households, 15.6% in laundry work, and 2.8% in manufacturing. Black people had the lowest-paid, precarious jobs and a system of de-facto-peonage emerged. Tables 3 and 4 show that racist discrimination continues to exist in the US economy today.

	Median household income 1968	Median household income 2015	Unemployment rate August 2016	Part-time for economic reasons 2015
Source	US Census Bureau	US Census Bureau	BLS	BLS

All	46,245	56,516	4.9%	4.4%
White	48,151	60,109	4.4%	4.2%
Black	28,394	36,898	8.1%	6.1%
White Women			3.9%	4.6%
Black Women			7.1%	6.2%
White Men			4.1%	3.9%
Black Men			7.6%	5.9%
16-19 year olds, white			14.0%	
16-19 year olds, black			26.1%	
Men			5.0%	4.1%
Women			4.9%	4.8%

Table 3: Income, unemployment and involuntary part-time work in the USA

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Source	BLS	BLS	BLS	BLS	BLS	BLS	BLS
All	38.9%	17.4%	10.5%	12.0%	0.7%	11.9%	5.1%
White	39.6%	16.2%	10.8%	11.8%	0.8%	11.4%	5.7%
Black	30.4%	24.8%	9.5%	14.2%	0.3%	15.4%	3.0%
White Women	44.0%	19.8%	11.2%	18.9%	0.4%	5.1%	0.3%
Black Women	35.2%	27.7%	10.7%	18.5%	0.1%	7.3%	0.2%
White Men	36.0%	13.1%	10.4%	5.8%	1.1%	16.8%	10.3%
Black Men	24.9%	21.6%	8.1%	9.3%	0.5%	24.7%	6.2%
Men	35.5%	14.2%	10.1%	6.3%	1.0%	17.4%	9.4%
Women	42.9%	21.1%	11.1%	18.5%	0.4%	5.5%	0.3%

Table 4: Occupational structure in the USA

1=Management and professional occupations 2015, 2=Service occupations 2015, 3=Sales occupations 2015, 4=Office and administrative occupations 2015, 5=Agricultural occupations 2015, 6= Manufacturing and transport occupations 2015, 7=Construction and extraction 2015

The two tables show the reality of economic discrimination in contemporary America. In the USA, the median income of a black household was in 1968 59.0% of a white household. In 2016, the situation had not much improved: The figure was 61.4%. Black women and men have a much higher unemployment rate than white women and men. Among young people, blacks have an unemployment rate that is almost twice as large as the one of whites. Black men and women are also more affected by precarious labour than white men and women. Whereas a larger share of black Americans than white Americans works in service labour, office labour, manufacturing and transport, white Americans are more represented in management and professional occupations. Given that management and professional jobs tend to be highly paid, racist wage and salary discrimination is built into the US occupational structure.

One of the features of what Wilson (1996) terms the era of meta-racism is that American blacks tend to be more affected by unemployment than whites. And their jobs are much more likely to be precarious, low-paid service jobs such as waiters, cleaners, fast food workers, or clerks.

Davis (2003, 2005, 2012, 2016) is also a critic of the prison-industrial complex. The privatisation of prisons turns these institutions into for-profit companies that make inmates labour to create profit. Racism makes people of colour more likely to be imprisoned, which is why there is not just a racist practice of imprisonment, but also racist exploitation in the prison-industrial complex. "The institution of the prison tells us that the nightmare of slavery continues to haunt us" (Davis, 2012: 138). "[B]lack bodies are considered dispensable within the 'free world' but as a major source of profit in the prison world" (2003: 95). Through the prison-industrial complex, "racism generates enormous profits for private corporations" (2012: 174). Davis speaks of the "imprisonment binge" (2005: 37): Instead of tackling the causes of social problems, the homeless, illiterate, poor, black and unemployed are imprisoned. "According to this logic the prison becomes a way of disappearing people in the false hope of disappearing the underlying social problems they represent" (2005: 38). Mass imprisonment "is supposed to make people feel better [and safer], but what it really does is divert their attention away from those threats to security that come from the military, police, profit-seeking corporations, and sometimes from one's own intimate partners" (Davis, 2005: 39-40). The prison "functions ideologically as an abstract site into which undesirables are deposited, relieving us of the responsibility of thinking about the real issues afflicting those communities from which prisoners are drawn in such disproportionate numbers. This is the ideological work that the prison performs – it relieves us of the responsibility of seriously engaging with the problems of our society, especially those produced by racism and, increasingly, global capitalism" (Davis, 2003: 16).

Angela Davis analyses the unfreedom of blacks in America as it was instituted by slavery. Women slaves not just faced exploitation like male slaves, but in addition were also sexually oppressed and exploited by being raped and forced to bear slaves in an industrial manner. In contemporary America, black people face multiple forms of discrimination and domination. In the prison-industrial complex, state-violence forces them to work for profit-generating corporations. "Although Black individuals have entered economic, social, and political hierarchies (the most dramatic example being the 2008 election of Barack Obama), the overwhelming number of Black people are subject to economic, educational, and carceral racism to a far greater extent than during the pre-civil rights era. In many ways, the demands of the BPP's Ten-Point Program are just as relevant – or perhaps even more relevant – as during the 1960s, when they were first formulated" (Davis, 2016: 2). The Black Panther Party's Programme demanded for example: "We Want An End To The Robbery By The Capitalists Of Our Black Community. [...] We

Want An Immediate End To Police Brutality And Murder Of Black People” (Black Panther Party, 1966).

By analysing the role of black women and men in American capitalism, Davis shows that capitalism requires gender-based and racist forms of exploitation. Sexism and racism are furthermore ideologies that reduce women to “sexual, childbearing, natural” beings (Davis, 1977: 163) and people of colour to their skin in order to justify discriminatory and exclusionary practices and distract attention from the real causes of society’s problems.

The analysis shows that racism continues to play an important ideological and economic role in capitalism and sustains exclusion and exploitation. Based on this discussion, we can next have a look at the role of racism and slavery in the context of digital labour.

3.2. *Racism, Slavery and Digital Labour*

3.2.1. *Slavery in the Age of Facebook*

One of the most important differences between wage-labour, slave-labour, reproductive labour and Facebook labour concerns their legal status and what makes the workers conduct labour. Slave-workers’ bodies and minds are a private property that the slave-master owns at all time. Slavery is the most reified form of labour, which means that slaves have no rights so that the slave-master can treat them as he pleases and is legally allowed to kill them. So what makes the slave work is in the final instance the fear of being killed or experiencing physical violence. In slavery, “the worker is distinguishable only as *instrumentum vocale* [vocal instrument] from an animal, which is *instrumentum semi-vocale* [semi-vocal instrument], and from a lifeless implement, which is *instrumentum mutum* [silent instrument]” (Marx, 1867: 303, footnote 18).

Whereas the slave constantly faces the threat of death, wage-labour only does so in particular cases, for example when workers are being asked to conduct life-threatening work, such as cleaning up nuclear waste. Other than the slave, the wage-worker owns him-/herself. In *Capital Volume 1*’s chapter 6, Marx (1867) formulates the unfreedom of wage-labour as the double freedom of labour: Modern labour is free because it is better off than slaves (although slavery has continued to exist in global capitalism), but it is also unfree because it is compelled to be exploited by capital and to having to enter class relations in order to be able to survive.

Proletarians’ minds and bodies are not the private property of the dominant class, as slaves are, they are rather compelled by the “silent compulsion of economic relations” (899), the violence of the market that makes ordinary people die if they do not obtain money that allows them to buy commodities, which compels many to become wage-workers.

A specific share of women experience domestic violence and economic dependence that forces them to conduct reproductive labour against their

will and creates their fear to leave their partner. So direct violence can be a means of coercion in the case of housework. But also commitment, solidarity and love are important driving forces of reproductive labour. Housework can frequently involve hybrids of love and hatred, pain and pleasure, play and toil, care and violence, feelings of self-fulfilment and alienation. Facebook labour is in the regular case not coerced by physical violence and psychological violence, but by monopoly power, which is a specific form of structural violence. Facebook's and Google's absolute market dominance and their restrictive terms of use and privacy policies force users to use these platforms if they do not want to suffer from social and informational disadvantages.

It would be a mistake to assume that the rise of capitalism and wage-labour has brought an end to slavery. Although slavery is older than wage-labour, it continues to exist in specific forms in capitalism. Jack Qiu (2016) speaks in his book *Goodbye iSlave: A Manifesto for Digital Abolition* of iSlavery to indicate that slavery is still a reality in the 21st century, where the iPhone has become one of the dominant tools for the organisation of life. Qiu bases his understanding of slavery on the 1926 UN Slavery Convention that foregrounds the ownership of a person by another one as the key feature of slavery. The Bellagio-Harvard Guidelines on the Legal Parameters of Slavery (Qiu, 2016: 189-196) specify that the ownership of a person can entail buying, transferring or selling her; exploiting her labour or sexually; managing such exploitative use; profiting from the use of a person; transferring the slave to another person (e.g. a heir or successor); or physically or psychologically mistreatment. These definitions are in line with Marx's understanding of slavery that foregrounds the unfree character of a slave so that s/he is not in possession of his/her own body and mind.

According to estimates, there were 45.8 million slaves in the world in the year 2016 (Walk Free Foundation, 2016), including high numbers in India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Uzbekistan, North Korea, Russia, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, Egypt, and Myanmar (Walk Free Foundation, 2016: 30). The same report provides a concise definition of slavery as "situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, abuse of power or deception, with treatment akin to a farm animal" (158).

Digital technologies are based on minerals such as cassiterite, coltan, gold, cobalt, or wolframite. Large amounts of it are extracted in conflict-ridden regions in the Congo. As a result, rebels and warlords that enslave villagers control some of the mines. Parts of the minerals used in mobile phones, laptops, etc. are based on slave labour and child labour. This phenomenon has come to be known as conflict minerals (Fuchs, 2014: chapter 6). Cobalt is an important mineral for the production of batteries used in phones and laptops. More than half of the world's supply comes from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Amnesty International (2016) documented:

Amnesty International and Afreewatch conducted research in artisanal mining areas in southern DRC in April and May 2015, visiting five mine sites. [...] Chronic exposure to dust containing cobalt can result in a potentially fatal lung disease, called “hard metal lung disease. [...] Many of the miners complained that they coughed a lot or had problems with their lungs. [...] UNICEF estimated in 2014 that approximately 40,000 boys and girls work in all the mines across southern DRC, many of them involved in cobalt mining. The children interviewed by researchers described the physically demanding nature of the work they did. They said that they worked for up to 12 hours a day in the mines, carrying heavy loads, to earn between one and two dollars a day (Amnesty International, 2016: 5-6).

One can be a slave for a limited time period (Qiu, 2016: 41). Qiu documents how Foxconn workers, who manufacture iPhones, iPads and other digital gadgets, faced “tremendous difficulty [...] to quit” and how “student interns were used as inexpensive and involuntary labor on a massive scale” (47). He shows how forced labour and the lack of freedom to quit employment, two types of slavery, exist within the manufacturing domain of the international division of digital labour (IDDL) (see also Fuchs 2014, 2015, 2016 for a detailed discussion of the IDDL). Qiu also documents Foxconn’s refusal to pay out wages to workers, violent and abusive Factory guards, and the control of Foxconn workers’ leisure and sleeping time. The example also shows that wage-labour can be a form of slavery. Qiu concludes that Foxconn’s management system should be seen as “institutions and practices similar to slavery” (82). The forms of control exercised include physical violence and structural, bureaucratic violence (forced internships, wage restraint, contracts that cannot be quit, etc.) so that any control of labour-time (its start and end) is forcefully removed from workers’ decision-power.

Jack Qiu (2016: chapter 4) also identifies free consumer labour as a form of slavery that he calls manufactured iSlavery. The implication of his analysis is that users of advertising-funded online platforms are Facebook slaves, Google slaves, etc., who are coerced by advertising, monopolies, play and the addiction to commodity and media consumption into working without payment for advertising-based media. Qiu writes that the manufactured iSlave show “voluntary servitude”, in which “[a]ddiction becomes enslavement” (111). The manufactured iSlave is a mind-slave – her/his mind is enclosed by the dominant class’s logic.

Slavery can be used as a more restrictive or more expansive term. Marx did both at once. He on the one hand saw the differences between slave-labour and wage-labour by stressing that slavery is the most unfree and life-threatening form of labour. He however also stressed certain parallels between pure slavery and other class relations. So he for example characterised patriarchy as a system, in which “the wife and children are the slaves of the husband” (Marx and Engels, 1845: 52) and spoke of capitalism’s “two poles of Capital and Wage-slavery” (Marx, 1871: 335).

Every class relation at least bears traces and has certain features of slavery because it always entails some form of unfreedom and coercion. There are historical dialectics of slavery.

But there are also reasons for not expanding the term slavery to every form of exploitation. There is a tendency for commonality in that slave labour, reproductive labour and Facebook labour are highly exploited and are unpaid forms of labour, in which all labour-time tends to be surplus-labour-time. But there is also a difference in respect to the difficulty of refusing labour, i.e. in respect to the political dimension of political economy that governs human activity, labour-power and labour-time: Regular wage-workers because of their double freedom can leave their employer's factory or office at the end of the working day. They have to return in order to earn a wage, but can also choose to search for another job, which is a relative freedom within unfreedom. In contrast to the wage-worker, the Congolese miner extracting coltan at gunpoint cannot leave the mine without being shot. He is a slave. Some Foxconn workers cannot leave the factory because they are locked into their contracts and into the factory walls all night and day. They too are slaves.

And what about the Facebook user? Is s/he a slave, too? S/he may spend lots of time on the platform, but can also choose to log-off, to deliberately turn off the computer and phone in order to sleep, spend some time talking to friends and family, make love, enjoy an uninterrupted walk in nature, etc. The Facebook-user's refusal of labour in the social factory is much easier to achieve than the Congolese miner's refusal. They are both highly exploited, but only the latter is a slave. And nonetheless all labour and all class relations have certain dimensions of slavery because they are all coerced into labour in particular ways. The exploitation of the wage-worker, the slave, the houseworker and the Facebook worker are in certain respects different as well as in certain other respects comparable. Only the collective revolt of slaves and other workers exploited by transnational corporations, their collective refusal to labour and search for alternatives, can put an end to capitalism and slavery.

Slaves can be houseworkers and digital workers, but not all houseworkers and digital workers are slaves in the classical sense of the term. A houseworker is a slave if s/he experiences violence that makes her afraid of leaving an abusive relationship. A digital worker is a digital slave if s/he for example is by debt bondage forced to work as gold farmer for a game company and can therefore not choose to leave the job.

Slaves do not have political and social rights. Wage-workers have specific social rights in respect to wages, social security, and trade union representation. Houseworkers only have limited social rights in respect to for example child benefits. Being a Facebook worker does not give you particular social rights and mostly very limited legal rights in respect to privacy and data protection. Whereas the wage-worker has a contractual and legally enforceable right to be paid a wage for the performed labour,

slaves, houseworkers and Facebook workers do not have such a right, which enables their exploitation as unpaid workers. But not all of digital labour and housework are unpaid. Parts of it are conducted as contractual labour. Paid carers and cleaners are an example. These are typically low-paid types of labour, often conducted by migrants and women. The intersection of reproductive labour and wage-labour tends to have a racialised and patriarchal character.

3.2.2. Racist Ideology and Digital Labour

Africans and Asians conduct the most exploitative and precarious jobs in the international division of digital labour (IDDL). In contrast, high paid software engineers – the digital labour aristocracy – in the Western world tend to be predominantly male and white (Fuchs, 2014). A structural form of racism operates in the IDDL.

Racism and challenges to racism also operate in the world of social media. On the one hand, racism makes use of social media. Here are two example tweets that were posted one day after Donald Trump won the 2016 presidential election: “#Trump ☠️ The end of #WhiteGenocide in America. #Nazi #SiegHeil”, “President Trump wants to know if you have any last words Mr Soros? #RevengeWillBeSweet #WhiteGenocide #RapeJihad #RWDS #Trump #Trump16” [+ image of a Nazi shooting a Jewish person]. On the other hand, also anti-racism is present on social media: In December 2016, the Twitter account of Black Lives Matter (@blklivesmatter) had around 195,000 and its Facebook group around 240,000 followers.

Commodity fetishism makes capitalism and wage-labour appear as natural properties of society, which tends to ideologically sustain both capitalism and class. Racism is an ideology that often justifies slavery and discriminatory labour practices. Sexism is an ideology that tries to chain women to the household and to create a gender pay gap. On Facebook and in housework, there is inverse commodity fetishism (Fuchs, 2014: chapter 11; Fuchs, 2015: chapter 5): The workers' immediate experience is not the production of commodities, but the creation of social relations. Digital workers have, as Jarrett (2016: 104) says, friends online. And houseworkers tend to care for those they love. The commodity form is hidden behind the social form so that commodity fetishism tends to take on an inverted form: For houseworkers and Facebook workers, it is not directly experienceable that they produce a commodity for Facebook.

Racism, nationalism, sexism and other ideologies can create economic, political and cultural advantages for specific groups in society, typically white men. How does this approach relate to the realm of digital labour? Eileen Meehan (2002) introduced the notion of the gendered audience commodity: The advertising industry tends to base advertising on sexism and to “discriminate against anyone outside the commodity audience of

white, 18 to-34-year-old, heterosexual, English-speaking, upscale men” (Meehan 2002, 220).

According to the UN Human Development Report (UNDP 2015), Norway and the USA are two of the world’s richest and most developed countries, whereas the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Malawi are three of the poorest. In 2014, the gross national income per capita was US\$52,947 in the USA, US\$64,992 in Norway, US\$581 in the Central African Republic (CAR), US\$680 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and US\$747 in Malawi. Measured based on this variable, CAR, DRC and Malawi were the world’s three poorest countries. Table 5 shows suggestions that Facebook calculates and provides to users for the maximum cost-per-click bid they should offer when presenting ads to users of a specific gender in a specific country.

Country	Gender	Suggested bid for a cost-per-click, in US\$
USA	Male	3.59
USA	Female	3.55
Norway	Male	4.48
Norway	Female	4.27
Central African Republic	Male	0.23
Central African Republic	Female	0.17
Democratic Republic of Congo	Male	0.23
Democratic Republic of Congo	Female	0.20
Malawi	Male	0.35
Malawi	Female	0.26

Table 5: Facebook’s suggested cost-per-click bid for users aged 18+ based on location and gender (data source: Facebook adverts manager, accessed on October 30, 2016)

The data indicates that Facebook’s algorithm works based on sexist and racist logic by assuming that users in poorer countries and poorer users are less valuable consumers, i.e. less likely to click on ads and to purchase advertised commodities, than male users and users in rich countries. The Facebook data commodity is both gendered and racialised. The digital housewife is not just exploited, but this exploitation is combined with patriarchal and racist algorithmic discrimination that assumes that the poor and the female digital housewife are inferior to the male, rich digital housewife. Therefore it assumes that the price for one click by the “inferior audience” should be less than the one of the “superior audience”.

4. Capitalism, Racism, and Patriarchy

Sections 2 and 3 have shown that class, patriarchy and racism are important dimensions in the age of Facebook and digital labour: Digital housework is one particular form of audience labour and reproductive labour that constitutes significant everyday lifetime. It is just like housework unpaid, exploited and producing a peculiar commodity. Slavery and racism also play an important role in digital capitalism. Digital capitalism and phenomena such as social media, digital labour, mobile

communication and big data that are associated with it, are part of the latest developments in advanced capitalism. Meta-racism takes on a specific form in it. Forced labour and child labour form an important dimension of the international division of digital labour. It especially concerns African and Asian miners and assemblage workers. Structural racism and sexism shape the international division of digital labour: Whereas people of colour in developing countries conduct the most exploited, unfree and precarious types of labour in the IDDL, the digital labour aristocracy of highly paid software engineers is predominantly white and male. Whereas highly skilled and highly paid managerial and knowledge work tend to be primarily dominated by white people, low-paid precarious service jobs in the USA tend to be the domain of black people. Algorithms tend to reproduce racist ideologies that discriminate against people of colour based on the assumption that they are poor and therefore less valuable consumers than white users. Contemporary racism is both communicated and challenged on social media.

Given this analysis, the question arises how we can make sense of the relationship of capitalism, patriarchy and racism today. One argument underlying this paper is that we have to go beyond intersectionality theory. Intersectionality theory is one of the most widely adopted approaches for understanding the relationship between forms of oppression. In the 1970s, the black-feminist Combahee River Collective (1977: 261) argued that “the major systems of oppression are interlocking”. These forms of domination are “racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression” (261). Based on such influences, intersectionality theory developed as an “analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization” (Hill Collins, 2000: 299). Inequality and power are “being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. [...] Intersectionality as an analytic tool examines how power relations are intertwined and mutually constructing. Race, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, ethnicity, nation, religion, and age are categories of analysis, terms that reference important social divisions” (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016: 2+7)

Eve Mitchell (2013) criticises intersectionality theory from a Marxist-feminist perspective. She writes that the intersectionality approach’s identity politics is a form of individualistic, naturalising “bourgeois politics” (21). Intersectionality theory would neglect the material commonalities of the oppressed, namely the importance of labour and that all oppressed groups and individuals are human. “Identity politics argues, ‘I am a black man,’ or ‘I am a woman,’ without filling out the other side of the contradiction ‘...and I am human.’” (15-16). Mitchell points out that intersectionality theory provides an analysis of interlocking dimensions of oppression. It is incomplete because it does not reflect on how these dimensions are grounded. The result is a relativist theory of oppression.

Vivek Chibber's (2013) critique of Subaltern Studies is comparable to Mitchell's critique of intersectionality theory. Chibber questions the assumption that the Global South is so fundamentally different from the West that theories wanting to understand it have to be radically different from any theory originating in the West, including Marxism. He argues that there is a universalising drive of capitalism that affects people worldwide in different ways, but also makes their oppression and struggles common. Marxism's critique of capitalism would allow a critique that is "cross-cultural, common to East as well as West" (285). Both the East and the West would see two forces of universalism – "the universal logic of capital [...] and social agents' universal interest in their well-being, which impels them to resist capital's expansionary drive" (291). One can say that Chibber stresses just like Mitchell that their quest for a humane society unites the world's oppressed. The struggle for such a society can best be termed socialism.

How can we think systematically about the relationship of capitalism, patriarchy and racism and avoid both reductionism (as in economic reductionism and identity politics-reductionism) and dualism (as in intersectionality theory)? How can one go beyond post-colonialism's and intersectionality theory's relativism?

David R. Roediger (2007) in his book *Wages of Whiteness* says that the racism practiced by a share of white workers is not a form of dopiness, but a form of strategic agency. Based on W. E. B. Du Bois, Roediger argues that "the pleasures of whiteness could function as a 'wage' for white workers. That is, status and privileges conferred by race could be used to make up for alienating and exploitative class relationships" (13). Wages of whiteness are for Angela Davis (2005: 93) "the privileges of those who benefit from the persistence of racism". Roediger does not give much attention to the circumstance that not all white people are part of the working class because there are also white (as well as non-white) capitalists. He also does not so much focus on white anti-racists, non-white racists and nationalists, and the "relationship between the struggle against male supremacism and white supremacism" (Allen, 2001).

But Roediger's wages of whiteness-approach is nonetheless an important approach of how to think about the relationship of class, gender and racism. It can be generalised: Whiteness can be understood in a Bourdieuan sense as a form of cultural or ideological capital that allows white workers to distinguish themselves from blacks. Masculinity is a form of ideological capital that makes men distinguish themselves from women and LGBT people. Whiteness and masculinity as ideologies help to accumulate reputation, status, and social distinction, i.e. cultural capital. As ideologies, they are produced in social relations, i.e. there is the labour of producing and reproducing whiteness and masculinity. Masculinity and whiteness are as patriarchal and racist ideologies forms of bio-politics, as they are grounded in making the human body a terrain of politics that acts as a field of cultural capital accumulation. The motivation for masculinity, whiteness, racism, nationalism, etc. is often, as

Roediger shows, the feeling of having to make up for alienation and exploitation by producing and reproducing oppression. The effect is then a distraction of energy and struggles from the “real” enemies. The pleasure derived from oppression and exploitation can be seen as a cultural “wage”. Political advantages derived from oppression and exploitation form a political “wage”. But there is a dimension beyond social distinction: Another wage of whiteness, nationalism and masculinity can in racist, nationalist and sexist societies and organisation be that ideological capital is used for attaining economic capital and/or political capital, i.e. better economic positions, wages, salaries, income and more political influence. In these cases, whiteness, nationalism, masculinity and other ideologies also take on the role of economic and political wages. Racism, nationalism, sexism and other ideologies can create economic, political and cultural surplus-“wages” or, better expressed, Bourdieuan forms of economic, political and cultural capital.

Desan (2013) argues that Bourdieu has a limited understanding of capital and does not enough theorise economic capital. The “notion of economic capital remains largely undertheorized” (337). By capital, “Bourdieu seems to mean simply any resource insofar as it yields power [...] In the end, what Bourdieu’s notion of capital lacks is not only an idea of capitalism as a particular historical formation but more fundamentally an idea of exploitation as a particular operation of power” (332). Although “Bourdieu is sensitive to class conflict, he does not in fact have a theory of exploitation in the sense of appropriating surplus-labor” (335).

Desan does not conclude that Marx and Bourdieu cannot be combined. He rather implies that such a combination must be guided by Marxist theory. Erik Olin Wright (1997) has attempted such a type of combination. He grounds the concept of class on the notion of exploitation and adds to it the concepts of skills and authority that are close to Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural and political/social capital. Both Wright and Bourdieu stress the importance of property, skill, and authority in class analysis. The difference is that there are two different rankings in these approaches: “*property, skill, authority* for Marxist class analysis; *skill, property, authority* for Bourdieu’s culturally grounded class analysis” (Wright, 1997: 173). For Wright, class exploitation remains the dominant aspect of capitalism, but he ascertains that skill and authority can result in “skill exploitation” (17) and “loyalty rent” (21). Relating this argument back to Roediger, we can say that within the capitalist economy, authority, culture and ideology can result in a monetary surplus-wage. And within the political and cultural system, exploitation and oppression can result in certain individuals and groups’ social advantages at the expense of others, or what could, in a metaphorical sense, be termed an ideological wage (a surplus of pleasure, enjoyment and status) and a political wage (a surplus of political influence). One aspect that Bourdieu and Marx’s analysis shares is the stress on how the logic of accumulation shapes capitalist society and brings about inequalities. Wright and Roediger extend this analysis in a Marxist manner by arguing that a) ideology, culture and authority result in surplus-wages in the economy and b)

ideology and politics in modern society are systems of accumulation, in which political and cultural surpluses are accumulated.

The surplus that ideology can produce is not just surplus pleasure and enjoyment in the suffering of others, but can also be economic, political and cultural in character. W. E. B. Du Bois argued in this context:

“It must be remembered that the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and tides of courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools. The police were drawn from their ranks, and the courts, dependent upon their votes, treated them with such leniency as to encourage lawlessness. Their vote selected public officials, and while this had small effect upon the economic situation, it had great effect upon their personal treatment and the deference shown them. White schoolhouses were the best in the community, and conspicuously placed, and they cost anywhere from twice to ten times as much per capita as the colored schools. The newspapers specialized on news that flattered the poor whites and almost utterly ignored the Negro except in crime and ridicule” (Du Bois, 1935: 700-701).

In digital capitalism, we can find an intersection of different forms of labour in the international division of digital labour – paid labour, unpaid labour, reproductive labour, and users’ digital labour. The economic dimension of the interrelation of these forms of labour is that capitalism requires and creates milieus of exploitation in order to sustain profitability. It strives to maximise capital accumulation by minimising labour costs. The diversification of labour is a result of the profit imperative. Non-standard forms of labour, such as slavery, precarious labour, freelancing, unpaid user labour, or housework, are an expression of this diversification. The result of it is that transnational digital media corporations are achieving high profits: In 2016, Apple made profits of US\$53.7bn and was the world’s ninth largest transnational corporations. AT&T was the twelfth largest (profit: US\$13.2bn), Verizon the 15th largest (US\$18bn), Microsoft the 23rd largest (US\$10.2bn), and Google/Alphabet the 27th largest (US\$17bn)³.

Capitalism is based on the capitalist class’ appropriation of surplus-labour and surplus-value. Given that the working day consist of two parts, necessary labour and surplus-labour, i.e. paid labour and unpaid labour, all labour in capitalism contains unpaid labour. The capitalist class’s interests is to maximise unpaid labour time. Étienne Balibar (2013) argues in this context that “what characterizes capitalism is a *normalization of overexploitation*. The reverse side of this is a class

³ Data source: Forbes 2000, 2016 list, <http://www.forbes.com/global2000/list/>, accessed on December 17, 2016.

struggle that tends to impose limits”. The sustenance and creation of forms of labour that are completely unpaid or have a high degree of unpaid labour time should therefore be understood as being part of this capitalist tendency to normalise over-exploitation. Unpaid digital labour is one of the newest manifestations of this tendency. Balibar concludes that “we should question the axiom” of “the distinction of *productive and unproductive labor*”. Theories of digital labour just like theories of reproductive labour are a contribution to this endeavour.

Sandoval (2013) provides a typology with 14 dimensions that are relevant for a systematic analysis of labour in capitalism. These dimensions can be grouped into the categories of means of production, workforce, relations of production, production process, results of production, and the role of the state. Table 6 builds on Sandoval’s typology. It uses a compressed version of her typology and adds to it the dimension of ideology that focuses on how justifications for the exploitation of specific forms of labour appear and are presented in public. The typology used in table 6 focuses on economic, political, and cultural/ideological dimensions of labour. It summarises the discussion of this paper.

Dimension	Aspect	Wage-labour	Slave-labour	Reproductive labour	Users’ unpaid digital labour on Facebook
1) Economy	Means of production	Brain, body, tools	Brain, body, uterus and genitals (women slaves), tools	Brain, body, uterus (women), genitals, tools	Brain, body, computers, online platforms
	Product of labour	Use-values and commodities owned by capitalist	Use-values and commodities owned by the slave-master, slaves (women slaves), workforce/labour-power (house slaves)	Commodity/use-value for capital: workforce and labour-power; Use-value: affects, social relations, means of subsistence	Commodity/use-value for capital: data commodity, attention; Use-value: social relations, affects
	Spaces of labour	Factory, office, social factory	Plantation (including contemporary plantations such as for-profit prisons)	Household, social factory	Internet
	Labour-time	Legal division between labour time and leisure time, necessary labour-time (paid) and surplus labour-time (unpaid)	Slave-master controls all time and can turn all life-time of slaves into labour-time, all labour-time is unpaid, slave-master has the legal power to end a slave’s life-time by killing her/him	a) All labour-time is unpaid; wages of the household’s wage labourers are used for buying the household’s means of consumption as means of production; b) Paid reproductive workers are freelancers or work for the state or for-profit companies	Online time as unpaid labour-time

2) Politics	Wages and benefits	Wages and salary, legally guaranteed social benefits (unemployment insurance, health insurance, pension system)	No wages/salary, unpaid labour; no legally guaranteed social benefits	a) No wages/salary, unpaid labour, limited legally guaranteed social benefits (child benefits) b) Low-paid labour (paid cleaners, babysitters and carers);	No wages/salary, unpaid labour; no legally guaranteed social benefits
	Legal aspects of labour	Double free labour: Labour-contract and labour legislation, freedom of the person, "wage-slave"	Double unfree labour: no labour-contract and legislation, no human rights, no freedom of the person: slave's body is owned by the slave-master	Unfree labour: no labour-contract and no labour legislation, family law, full or partial or no freedom of the person,	Corporate self-regulation (terms of use and privacy policies as labour contracts that provide no rights to users), data protection legislation
	Political representation of labour	Trade unions, labour parties	Abolition movement, anti-racist movement,	Feminist movement	Privacy advocacy movements, consumer protection groups, digital labour unions (?)
	Labour struggles and demands	Strikes, sabotage, occupations, worker co-operatives; Wage-demands, shortening of the working day, better working conditions	Slave rebellions; Political freedom, equality	Protests; Equality, wages for housework, equal pay for equal work, abolishment and socialisation of housework	Protests, ad blocking, platform co-operatives; Participatory media fee, online advertising tax, public service Internet, wages for use of Facebook, Google, etc.
	Coercion and control of labour	Dull compulsion and structural violence of the labour-market	Physical violence, death threats, rape	Physical and sexual violence, social commitment (social violence)	Monopoly power, social disadvantages (social violence)
3) Culture and Ideology	Ideology of labour repression	Commodity fetishism, wage-labour fetishism	Racism	Sexism, inverse commodity fetishism	Inverse commodity fetishism

Table 6: Characteristics of four types of labour

The control and coercion of labour works with both political-economic and ideological means: Political-economic means include physical violence, sexual violence, monopoly power, social violence, and the labour market's structural violence. The discussion has shown that in the international division of digital labour, we can find all of these forms of violence. Ideological repression takes on specific forms in the international division of digital labour.

Classical commodity fetishism does not allow workers and consumers to immediately experience all the forms of exploitation that are underlying

the international division of digital labour. In the usage of social media, there is just like in housework an inverse form of commodity fetishism that veils the role of the commodity by foregrounding sociality. Social media use does not feel like labour, but is unpaid labour that creates profits. Users' digital labour creates a big data commodity that digital media corporations sell to advertisers. The big data commodity is both gendered and racialised: Algorithms are based on the assumption that white, male users in the West are bona fide consumers potentially buying many commodities and spending lots of money, whereas others are considered to be inferior consumers. "The categorisations of targeted ad groups "based on gender (and also other stereotypical features of class, race, ethnicity, and age) function as a kind of discrimination by assigning differential value to these different target markets" (Shepherd, 2014: 164). Classical ideology and algorithmic ideology create a paradoxical situation: In paid digital labour, white men dominate the employment structure and can obtain gendered and racialised wages of whiteness. People of colour (child labour and slaves in the Congo, predominantly female assemblage workers in China, etc.) in contrast have the most highly exploited and most precarious jobs in the international division of labour. At the same time, white men are also the privileged objects of exploitation in online advertising and unpaid digital labour based on racist and sexist ideologies designed into algorithms. New racism justifies the exploitation, exclusion, domination, or annihilation of an out-group. One can draw a "distinction between a racism of extermination or elimination (an 'exclusive' racism) and a racism of oppression or exploitation (an 'inclusive' racism)" (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991: 39). In the international division of digital labour, one can both find the exclusive and the exploitative type of racism.

5. Conclusion

This paper studied the connection of capitalism, patriarchy and racism in the digital age. Capitalism is inherently patriarchal and racist in character and uses ideology and discrimination for deepening exploitation and domination. Unpaid labour is not unproductive, but rather constitutes a super-exploited form of productive labour that generates surplus-value without wage. Based on David Roediger, one can argue that racism, nationalism, sexism and other ideologies can create economic, political and cultural surplus-"wages" or, better expressed, Bourdieuan forms of economic, political and cultural capital for dominant groups.

I took up Kylie Jarrett's notion of the digital houseworker in order to show commonalities and differences between three forms of unpaid labour, namely slave-labour, reproductive labour, and Facebook labour. These three forms of labour were also compared to wage-labour. Combining the notion of the digital houseworker with Eileen Meehan's concept of the gendered audience commodity allows to understand that Facebook's data commodity is both gendered and racialised, which shows that digital capitalism instrumentalises both sexism and patriarchy by building their logic into algorithms that determine the data commodity's price by

assuming that the price for one hour of labour should be discriminated based on gender and country.

Capitalism requires what Rosa Luxemburg (1913/2003) termed milieus of primitive accumulation in order to survive. Forms of unpaid labour constitute such territories. Housework has traditionally been such a milieu of exploitation that has sustained capitalism and wage-labour. Housework means “superexploitation of non-wage labourers [. . .] upon which wage labour exploitation then is possible” (Mies, 1986: 48) because it involves the “externalization, or ex-territorialization of costs which otherwise would have to be covered by the capitalists” (110). Housewifisation means the extension of super-exploitation and unpaid labour to realms beyond housework so that work or labour is transformed in such ways that it shows some parallels with the conditions of housework (Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen and von Werlhof, 1988; Mies, 1986; Fuchs. 2014). Housewifised labour “bears the characteristics of housework” (Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen and von Werlhof. 1988: 10).

Facebook labour is just like unpaid internships and the precariat’s labour a form of housewifised labour. Unpaid forms of labour are differently exploited than wage-labour in that it forms super-exploited milieus of primitive accumulation. How can unpaid labour today best be made visible in order to resist and overcome it? All labour is based on a specific degree of surplus-labour. In unwaged labour, surplus-labour time is extended to a maximum. A universal basic income guarantee that is funded out of capital taxation is a progressive demand that builds on and extends the demand of wages for housework. That the organic composition of labour is around 5.8 in an advanced country like the USA shows the role that unpaid labour-time plays in capitalism. Socialist universal basic income does not aim at reforming or improving capitalism, but to provide humans autonomous space and time beyond capitalism so that foundations for thinking, living, producing, consuming and usage beyond the logic of capital can be strengthened.

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