AI and Social Aspects

Weekly Analysis — https://ainews.social

In the proliferating discourse around artificial intelligence and its social impacts, a stark asymmetry emerges: those who document AI's harms rarely overlap with those who experience them. The academic journals overflow with analyses of algorithmic bias, the policy reports multiply with each governance framework, yet the voices of those wrongfully arrested, denied benefits, or subjected to constant surveillance remain notably absent from shaping the solutions proposed in their name. This disconnect reveals not merely a gap in representation but a fundamental structure of power that determines who gets to define AI's problems and prescribe its futures.

The evidence is damning and consistent. [22] documents case after case of Black Americans detained based on algorithmic misidentification, yet the discourse remains dominated by those studying the phenomenon rather than those living it. When [3] examines how predictive systems reshape family separation decisions, it does so through ethnographic observation rather than centering the families torn apart. This pattern—of harm experienced by the marginalized but narrated by the credentialed—reveals the first dimension of power in AI discourse: the authority to speak about rather than speak from experience.

[22] Wrongful Arrests Pile Up Due to Facial Recognition Technology

[3] Algorithmic Harms in Child Welfare: Uncertainties in Practice ...

The Architecture of Algorithmic Power

Understanding power in AI discourse requires mapping who controls the fundamental decisions about algorithmic systems: their design, deployment, and governance. The concentration of this power in specific institutions and geographic locations creates what [6] identifies as digital colonialism—a system where data flows from the global periphery to be processed in the core, returning as algorithmic decisions that reshape local realities.

This architectural power manifests most clearly in education, where [15] warns that AI systems trained on Western data and pedagogical assumptions risk erasing indigenous knowledge systems. The promise of democratized access to education through AI masks a more troubling reality: educational AI platforms extract learning data from African students to train models that reflect and reinforce Western

[6] Colonialismo digital en la era de la IA y el aprendizaje automático ...

[15] L'IA dans l'éducation africaine : progrès ou perte de mémoire

epistemologies. As [11] documents, this extraction extends beyond data to physical infrastructure, with AI companies securing water rights and energy resources in regions already facing scarcity.

[11] How AI firms are appropriating Latin America's resources | D+C - Development + Cooperation

The labor dimension of this architectural power remains particularly invisible. While Silicon Valley celebrates AI breakthroughs, [12] exposes the human infrastructure enabling these systems: content moderators in Kenya traumatized by violent content, data labelers in Uganda working for pennies per task. This geographic arbitrage of suffering—where the psychological and economic costs of AI development are outsourced to the Global South while profits accumulate in the North—represents a form of power so naturalized it rarely enters mainstream AI ethics discussions.

[12] How AI Hype Masks the Exploitation of African Workers

Documentation as a Form of Power

The ability to document, categorize, and theorize AI's impacts constitutes its own form of power. Academic institutions, think tanks, and advocacy organizations have produced an extensive literature on algorithmic bias, yet this documentation often serves institutional rather than transformative purposes. [2] provides a comprehensive review of bias across educational AI systems, while [23] offers frameworks for ethical AI deployment. These contributions are valuable, yet they reveal a troubling pattern: the proliferation of documentation without corresponding shifts in power.

[2] Algorithmic Bias in Education

[23] Towards responsible artificial intelligence in education: a systematic ...

The French case illustrates this dynamic starkly. [20] represents years of investigation into algorithmic discrimination in public services, documenting how welfare recipients are scored and sorted by opaque systems. Yet as [21] reveals, even after source code disclosure exposed discriminatory design, the fundamental power relations remain unchanged: the state continues to subject the most vulnerable to algorithmic judgment while those designing and deploying these systems face minimal accountability.

[20] PDF Rapport algorithmes, systèmes d IA et services publics : quels droits ...

[21] Scoring of welfare beneficiaries: the indecency of CAF's algorithm now ...

This documentary power operates through a specific epistemology that privileges certain forms of knowledge. Quantitative evidence of bias, technical audits, and policy frameworks dominate the discourse, while experiential knowledge, community wisdom, and lived expertise remain marginalized. The irony is profound: systems claimed to be "data-driven" systematically exclude the data of lived experience from those most affected by their decisions.

The Governance Fixation

Perhaps no aspect of AI discourse reveals power dynamics more clearly than the obsessive focus on governance frameworks. With governance challenges comprising 36.8% of all AI discourse and regulation discussions appearing in 594 articles, the conversation has become dominated by institutional responses that preserve existing power structures while appearing to address concerns. [Bâtir une politique d'IA à l'école : de l'urgence à la démarche structurée] exemplifies this approach, offering comprehensive frameworks for educational AI governance without questioning who sets these policies or whether affected communities were consulted.

The governance fixation serves multiple functions in maintaining power relations. First, it shifts focus from structural inequalities to procedural compliance. When [22] addresses algorithmic wage-setting, the solution proposed is transparency requirements rather than questioning why algorithms should determine human worth at all. Second, governance frameworks create new forms of expertise and authority—AI ethics boards, compliance officers, audit firms—that extract value from the very problems AI creates. As [16] notes, this produces a "productivity paradox" where institutional energy goes into managing AI's negative effects rather than questioning its deployment.

[22] State lawmakers seek to regulate employer use of AI for wage decisions

[16] L'IA et le travail : la promesse de productivité au défi de la formation et de la cohésion sociale

The European approach, often celebrated as a model for AI governance, reveals these limitations starkly. While the EU AI Act creates categories of risk and compliance requirements, [1] demonstrates how algorithmic systems continue to immiserate the poor despite regulatory frameworks. The power to define what constitutes "high risk" AI, to determine acceptable trade-offs between efficiency and equity, and to enforce compliance remains concentrated in the same institutions that created these problems.

[1] AI was supposed to make the UK benefits system more efficient. Instead ...

Voices from the Margins

When marginalized communities do manage to insert their voices into AI discourse, the response reveals how power operates to contain dissent. [8] documents how student activism against facial recognition is met with appeals to safety that obscure questions of control. These students understand what academic studies often miss: surveillance systems don't just watch; they reshape behavior, chill dissent, and entrench existing hierarchies.

[8] Emory Students Protest AI Surveillance on Campus

The lawsuit culture emerging around AI reveals both possibilities and limitations for challenging algorithmic power. When [17] students

[17] Lawrence school district sued in federal court for use of AI-powered ...

use legal mechanisms to resist surveillance, they must translate their experiences of harm into the language of constitutional violation. This translation requirement—where lived experience must be converted into legally cognizable claims—represents another form of power that determines whose grievances get heard.

Labor voices reveal similar dynamics. [18] shows how algorithmic management intensifies exploitation while making it harder to organize collective resistance. The atomization of workers through platforms, the opacity of algorithmic decision-making, and the classification of employees as "independent contractors" all serve to fragment potential solidarity. When drivers do organize, as documented in [7], they face the challenge of protesting an algorithm—an adversary that cannot be confronted directly, only through the corporate structures that deploy it.

[18] New Research Exposes Deepening Exploitation of Uber Drivers by ...

[7] Drivers Protest Uber's 'Black Box' Fare System

The Geography of AI Discourse

The geographic concentration of AI discourse in the Global North, particularly the United States and Europe, creates its own power dynamics. While [5] connects environmental justice to AI deployment and [14] details the carbon footprint of campus AI systems, the communities bearing the environmental costs of data center construction and resource extraction rarely appear in these analyses.

[5] ClimateUni Statement on AI - climatejusticeuniversitiesunion.org

[14] L'essor de l'IA sur les campus a un coût environnemental caché

This geographic inequality intersects with linguistic power. AI discourse predominantly occurs in English, with French representing the second most common language in policy discussions. [13] notes how this linguistic hierarchy shapes AI education in India, where English-medium instruction becomes a prerequisite for AI literacy, further marginalizing students educated in local languages. The promise of AI democratizing education confronts the reality that one must first master the colonizer's language to access these tools.

[13] Integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into School Curricula

The Latin American perspective, when it does appear, often comes through critical lenses that challenge dominant narratives. [10] represents a rare example of Global South leadership in algorithmic transparency, proposing concrete mechanisms for public oversight that go beyond Northern governance models. Yet even this progressive approach must contend with the reality that most algorithmic systems deployed in Latin America are designed elsewhere, embedding assumptions and values from other contexts.

[10] Guía práctica ¿Cómo abrir los algoritmos públicos?. Recomendaciones para la implantación de registros de algoritmos públicos,

From Harm to Agency

The most revealing aspect of AI discourse may be the gap between documentation of harm and creation of agency. While 39.6% of analyzed articles identify ethical failures in AI systems, far fewer propose mechanisms for affected communities to exercise meaningful control. [4] discovers that students lose confidence in their own judgment when AI systems make errors, yet the solution proposed is better error handling rather than questioning automated grading itself.

[4] Am I Wrong, or Is the Autograder Wrong? Effects of AI Grading Mistakes ...

This pattern—where problems are identified but solutions remain within existing power structures—appears across domains. [Let's Banish the Bias in AI Models] calls for technical debiasing while maintaining the fundamental framework of algorithmic decision-making. [9] documents how educational institutions shift from resistance to accommodation, framing this as pragmatic adaptation rather than capitulation.

[9] Faculty Moving Away From Outright Bans on AI, Study Finds

The occasional moments of successful resistance prove instructive. When New York banned facial recognition in schools following sustained advocacy, as reported in [19], it demonstrated that algorithmic power can be challenged through collective action. Yet these victories remain exceptional, requiring extraordinary mobilization to achieve what should be ordinary: the right to education without surveillance, to access public benefits without algorithmic judgment, to work without being managed by black-box systems.

[19] New York bans facial recognition in schools after report finds risks ...

Conclusion: Redistributing Discursive Power

The analysis of power in AI discourse reveals a troubling reality: those who bear the costs of algorithmic systems rarely shape the conversations about their reform. The proliferation of governance frameworks, ethical guidelines, and bias audits, while valuable, operates within existing power structures rather than challenging them. Real transformation requires not just better documentation of AI's harms but a fundamental redistribution of who gets to define problems and design solutions.

This redistribution must begin with recognizing forms of knowledge currently excluded from AI discourse. The taxi driver who understands algorithmic management through embodied experience, the welfare recipient who navigates automated systems daily, the student who feels the chilling effects of surveillance—these perspectives hold insights that no amount of academic analysis can replicate. As [24] argues, the real challenge is not technical but social: how to create

[24] « La vraie course à l'intelligence artificielle est sociale, pas technologique »

mechanisms for democratic participation in decisions about algorithmic systems.

The path forward requires more than inclusion; it demands a fundamental shift in how we conceptualize expertise, authority, and agency in relation to AI systems. Until those subjected to algorithmic power become central to shaping algorithmic futures, AI discourse will remain what it currently is: a conversation among the powerful about how to manage the powerless, a documentary exercise that catalogs harm without catalyzing justice. The question is not whether AI can be made more ethical or fair within existing structures, but whether we can imagine and build structures where those most affected by AI systems have the power to accept, reject, or reshape them. Only then will the promise of AI as a democratizing force move from rhetoric to reality.

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12. How AI Hype Masks the Exploitation of African Workers
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