

D I S E R N O

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journal of design culture
Homogenised Heritage:
AI and Central Europe



***HOMOGENISED
HERITAGE: AI AND
CENTRAL EUROPE***

***THE IMPACT OF AI ON LOW-
RESOURCE LANGUAGES AND
VISUAL CULTURES IN THE
VISEGRAD COUNTRIES***

Disegno

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AI ASSIMILATIONISM: THE CULTURAL FLATTENING OF LOCALITIES IN GENERATIVE MODELS

Ania Malinowska

ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the concept of AI assimilationism to describe a growing tendency in which local and non-Western cultural aesthetics are absorbed into dominant global AI systems that are largely shaped by Western, particularly American, values. Through this process, distinct cultural expressions are rendered visible only after being filtered, standardised, and reformatted to align with prevailing stylistic norms, linguistic hierarchies, and commercial logics. Drawing on cultural theory and histories of mainstreaming minority cultures, the paper argues that AI assimilationism reinforces existing geopolitical and epistemic asymmetries by privileging English-dominated, Western narrative models and marginalizing non-standard languages, aesthetics, and knowledge practices. Focusing on Eastern European cultural production as a case study, it demonstrates how visibility within AI systems often entails the loss of critical specificity, echoing previous examples of cultural mainstreaming, such as the commodification of Black Lives Matter, where political edge and transformative potential were diluted. The paper identifies the emergent risks of digital “ghettoisation,” wherein minority cultures circulate globally but only in narrow, marketable forms. In response, it explores alternative strategies including grassroots artistic interventions, community-based dataset creation, multilingual model development, and demands for epistemic sovereignty. The paper ultimately calls for culturally grounded AI: systems designed not to assimilate but to amplify diverse cultural perspectives, challenging the reproduction of entrenched hierarchies in contemporary technoculture.

#AI assimilationism; #epistemic sovereignty; #non-Western aesthetics; #digital ghettoisation

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INTRODUCTION

For some time now, there has been a subtle yet pervasive trend of local and non-Western cultural aesthetics being absorbed into dominant global AI systems, which are often shaped by Western, particularly American, values. This process is referred to as AI assimilationism. It gives rise to a form of filtered representation, whereby distinct local content is adapted to align with the stylistic norms, policies, and commercial logic that characterise dominant modernities. This concept draws from broader cultural theories that have examined how fringe or minority cultures are often brought into the mainstream, but only after adjusting to its rules. Within the paradigm of AI, cultural content originating from Eastern Europe tends to garner visibility only when it aligns with conventional, English-dominated, Western storytelling models. While this may appear to be an advancement in terms of the representation of diverse cultural identities within global AI systems, a more thorough examination is necessary to ascertain the extent to which it truly represents progress. However, in practice, this approach frequently results in the marginalisation of non-standard languages, aesthetics, and modes of knowledge. The outcome of this process is a digital reinforcement of long-standing cultural hierarchies. This process also risks creating what could be termed a “ghetto effect,” in which marginalised cultures become confined to narrow, easily marketable versions of themselves. This phenomenon has been previously observed, for instance in the case of the Black Lives Matter movement, which, in certain instances, was incorporated into the mainstream to the extent that its original radical message and agenda were diluted (no actual systematic change followed it).

A similar set of dynamics is observed whenever minority or non-normative cultures are integrated into dominant frameworks. While this may result in increased visibility, it can also lead to the erosion of their unique characteristics and distinctiveness. It is imperative to acknowledge this pattern to comprehend the risks confronting Eastern European cultural production within AI systems. In response to these trends, alternative strategies are being proposed, including grassroots artistic initiatives, community-based dataset creation, efforts to support multilingual AI training, and broader calls for epistemic sovereignty. The ultimate objective is not merely to achieve inclusion, but rather to cultivate culturally grounded AI: systems that do not merely assimilate local cultures, but rather amplify and respect their unique perspectives.

The present paper argues that AI assimilationism functions as a form of digital colonialism, whereby the absorption of local cultures into global AI systems is not neutral but actively reshapes cultural expression to fit dominant norms. The fundamental contention is that this process, propelled by linguistic standardisation, economies of visibility, and misidentification, engenders a simulated inclusion that serves to reinforce prevailing hierarchies. The analysis demonstrates how Eastern European cultural artefacts are distorted in generative AI outputs. It is demonstrated that visibility in these systems often comes at the cost of authenticity and critical agency. The paper ultimately puts forward a call for a paradigm shift: from assimilation to co-creation.

To unpack these mechanisms, this paper employs a critical, mixed-methods approach that combines discourse analysis of AI-generated cultural artefacts (such as Eastern European folk art and regional dress) with a comparative study of their ethnographic and historical contexts. The juxtaposition of algorithmic outputs with the lived meanings of these artefacts reveals how AI systems systematically distort cultural specificity through linguistic standardisation, economies of visibility, and misidentification. The overarching organising methodologies employed in this study are postcolonial digital humanities and critical algorithm studies. The objective is twofold: firstly, to critique the corruption of cultural difference, and secondly, to identify pathways for designing AI systems that preserve local knowledge and aesthetic traditions.

THE CONCEPT OF “ARTIFICIAL” BELONGING

Historically, marginalised groups and cultures have sought to gain access to dominant representational systems through literature, media, and more recently, digital infrastructures. This endeavour has been driven by a desire to challenge the prevailing patterns of modernity and the matrix of recognition that have come to define our contemporary society. This drive is of political and symbolic importance, since recognition is not merely a courtesy, but “a vital human need” (Taylor 1994, 26). However, systemic recognition is profoundly influenced by an inaccurate “homogenous mould” (43). In this paradigm, marginalised or “peripheral” cultures are recognised only when they are legible within the dominant semiotic order.

In the context of algorithmic representations, belonging is facilitated through the utilisation of westernised visual codes and metadata schemas. The digital rendering of folk art and craft traditions, including the traditional Polish Łowicz paper cut-out and Podhale embroidery, is a subject worthy of consideration. These forms are characterised by a rich symbolism, embedded in fabrics, colours, and patterns, and produced through techniques that have been handed down over centuries. They are imbued with specific rituals and values. It is evident that they serve as repositories of cultural memory and aesthetic value. When platforms such as MidJourney or DALL·E are prompted to generate images based



FIGURE 1. The original Łowicz pattern. Publicly available online image; author not identified.



FIGURE 2. The Łowicz pattern recreated by ChatGPT v. 5.1

on such input, the outputs (although they may appear accurate or even beautiful) reveal a clear alignment with Western aesthetics. Rather than employing bold primaries, artists instead introduce pastel tones, glossy finishes, and overly symmetrical compositions. Furthermore, the utilisation of vague designations such as “Slavic decorative” or “Eastern European folk” serves to further obfuscate and distort specific regional identity markers.

Prior to the advent of ChatGPT and related technologies, Bender et al. (2021, 615) observed that “LMs trained on extensive, uncurated, static web datasets encode dominant views that are deleterious to marginalised demographics”. This phenomenon can be attributed to a systemic misrecognition, whereby specificity is lost and substituted with more generalised, market-friendly symbols. This is precisely what Spivak (1988) once identified as the muting of the “subaltern speaking”. When local voices become part of dominant systems, they are translated in ways that reinforce the logic of the centre. This process can be described as a subtle but steady appropriation of situated cultural expressions into standardised, globally palatable formats. In this process, the concept of belonging evolves into a contrived state, manifesting as a facsimile of inclusion that obscures the mechanisms of flattening and erasure.

Assimilationism is predicated on a structurally produced cultural risk. It is important to note that AI systems are not neutral tools for processing data; rather, they are technologies embedded with assumptions about what counts as knowledge, beauty, value, and normativity. These assumptions are shaped by data infrastructures built in the Global North, which are often dominated by English-language sources, Euro-American categories, and capitalist imperatives (Benjamin 2019). AI assimilationism is a concept that has been demonstrated to have an impact on the way in which certain assumptions are made, and to instigate what has been termed “technological redlining” or discriminatory digital decisions (Noble 2018, 1). These decisions have been shown to tend to promote the development of biased ethnic profiles on the World Wide Web.

The aforementioned phenomenon has been especially noted in the context of linguistic standardisation, economies of visibility and misidentification. The first of these is predicated on the assumption that English-language prompts, interfaces, and training datasets are the default. This default setting serves to attenuate the intricate tapestry of global linguistic diversity, thereby diminishing the expressive potential of AI to a level that is constrained by the prevailing language norms. It is evident that minority expressions, languages and dialects are frequently absent or underrepresented in these datasets. This phenomenon results in outputs that are unable to engage with or represent their unique semantic structures or cultural references in a meaningful manner. In the event of such languages being included, there is a possibility that they may be incorrectly rendered (i.e. misspelled, mispronounced, or mistranslated), which in turn could result in distortions of cultural meaning. A pertinent example in this context pertains to diacritics.

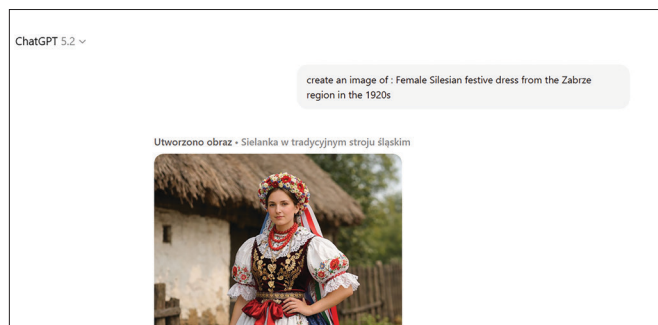
With regard to economies of visibility, AI systems tend to promote content that aligns with dominant cultural norms, while simultaneously disregarding content that is unfamiliar or unconventional. It is evident that a significant proportion of artificial intelligence models

are programmed to place a premium on content that has already attained a high level of popularity or has been frequently observed. The effectiveness of this programming is gauged by the extent to which these models align with established metrics of engagement or usage. This frequently results in the exclusion of indigenous patterns, oral storytelling traditions, and local folk art from data training. This predicament is exacerbated when such content is excessively specifically tagged or does not employ widely recognised labels, thereby hindering the capacity of algorithms to recognise or retrieve it. Consequently, these cultural forms become less visible over time, creating a feedback loop where only those that already have visibility continue to be amplified, while other ways of knowing are systematically excluded. In such conditions, templates for content representation increasingly derive from what is already visible, so that historically and regionally specific categories are replaced by generalised imageries. It is evident that the visual phenomena under scrutiny are not solely the consequence of feedback processes; rather, they are the manifestation of “imaginative geographies” (Said 1978), that is to say, the result of the assembly of geographically marked features that, despite the dissolution of their local signification, maintain visual discernibility.

Misidentification is most evident in the methods employed by AI systems to tag and categorise non-Western cultural symbols. A prompt such as “Female Silesian festive dress from the Zabrze region in the 1920s” will typically produce a caption such as “Southern Polish or German female dress from the turn of the twentieth century.” This slippage exemplifies the prevalent practice of attributing local, context-rich symbols with vague or externally imposed labels such as “primitive”, “ethnic”, or “exotic”. The employment of such tags has been demonstrated to misrepresent meaning, depoliticise cultural forms, and further commodify them through familiarisation. Anchored in taxonomies shaped by Western art history, anthropology, or the tourism industry, AI systems reduce complex cultural artefacts to aesthetic novelties, detached from their historical and political significance. This phenomenon can be understood as a re-enactment of long-standing patterns of appropriation, which now find expression in digital systems.

FIGURE 3. The culturally specific prompt in ChatGPT v.5.2 “Create an image of a female Silesian festive dress from the Zabrze region in the 1920s” with a fragment of the prompt’s outcome captioned [in Polish]: “Sielanka w tradycyjnym stroju śląskim” (eng. A pastoral scene in traditional Silesian attire).

FIGURE 4. ChatGPT v. 5.2’s response to the prompt ‘Create an image of a female Silesian festive dress from the Zabrze region in the 1920s’ and the caption accompanying the generated image. The caption says, “Sielanka w tradycyjnym stroju śląskim” (eng. A pastoral scene in traditional Silesian attire).



THE GHETTO CULTURE OF CULTURAL AI

The political economy of data capitalism, upon which cultural AI is predicated, is characterised by the extensive extraction of data comprising images, texts, sounds, symbols, and other content. This content is typically harvested without the requisite consent or contextual integrity, resulting in disparities in social contribution and social gratification. Media theorist McKenzie Wark (2019) observes that the value extracted from cultural labour is frequently divorced from the people and social/cultural environments that produced it. Within the domain of generative AI, this devaluation manifests particularly in the transformation of cultural motifs from Eastern Europe, Africa, and Indigenous communities into aesthetic commodities that are disseminated independently of their geographical origins. Concerns regarding ethical issues, including those pertaining to ownership and attribution, have been identified as a grave concern. Another such issue is the questionable imbalance of normativity (global/local, representative/marginal, representative/exotic) that is exacerbated under the pretext of democratisation, thereby engendering the phenomenon of the “cultural ghetto”.

The cultural ghetto is not a spatial form, but rather a symbolic and infrastructural condition that renders cultural material visible, albeit within tightly constrained limits. In this particular context, the term “ghetto culture” is employed to denote a regime of representation that ostensibly encompasses the “other”; however, this incorporation is undertaken in a manner that serves to perpetuate marginality. The cultural ghetto functions in a manner that is both insular and opposed to the prevailing mainstream. It is observable yet peripheral, and while it is tolerated, it is not integrated.

My understanding of assimilationism in the context of ghetto culture is derived from the field of queer studies, in which scholars have critically unpacked the elements of conditional social “inclusion” (Meyer 1994). While numerous scholars, including Martin P. Levine, have emphasised geographical segregation, often in reference to designated locations, they have also underscored the conditional nature of inclusion, characterised by symbolic isolation and constrained access to meaningful participation in the broader social sphere. As Levine (1979, 364) defines it in the context of the cultural ghetto “social isolation denotes the segregation of a ghettoised group from meaningful social relations with the larger community, an isolation produced by prejudices against the ghettoised people or by the social distance differing cultural practices create between the group and the larger community”. This logic has existed across cultural history and contexts for a considerable period. However, a novel development is the utilisation of artificial intelligence systems to implement exclusion through categorisation and tagging, as opposed to the more traditional approach of censorship. The emergence of AI ghettoisation (as a consequence of AI assimilationism) signifies the

establishment of parallel pathways of cultural recognition, with Western aesthetics being regarded as universal.

A notable contemporary illustration of this phenomenon is the trajectory of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which has garnered significant attention due to its visibility and impact. The catalyst for the initial rise in global awareness of the Black Lives Matter movement was radical, decentralised digital activism, which utilised hashtags, protest footage and grassroots mobilisations to achieve this. However, the radical edge of this movement was rapidly co-opted by the state. Cultural “corporations” adopted the slogans and themes of the movement without implementing any significant structural reforms within their institutions. As Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) observes in her extensive analysis of this issue, progressive movements are often commercialised, and media and cultural institutions perform “wokeness” to promote the concept of change without implementing any actual transformation. This phenomenon is further facilitated by hashtag activism (Jackson, Bailey, and Foucault Welles 2020), through which institutions appear supportive, yet the genuine calls for change that underpin the hashtags are often disregarded. The #BLM initiative, which began as a powerful social movement, has rapidly evolved into a corporate-dominated form of allyship. Its instrumentalisation was evident in the realms of publishing, art, and media. The publication of anthologies of black poetry increased significantly. The establishment of black-curated exhibitions was initiated. The transformation of mainstream institutions was not observed. The prevailing sentiment that emerged was one of reinforced perception that Black culture was to be confined to a separate, designated space.

The phenomenon of digital expression in Eastern Europe is characterised by a similar logic to that observed in other regions, particularly in relation to marginalised communities. The potential exists for its inclusion to be contingent upon separation, irrespective of its manifestation in language, visual form or narrative structure. AI assimilationism treats non-Western creative work as exceptional, as if it were not part of an inclusive whole; Western work, on the other hand, is still regarded as universal and the norm. An illustration of this phenomenon can be observed in the reception of Polish avant-garde AI-generated art. When exhibited in international contexts, this art is often labelled as “regional” or “Eastern European”, thereby ascribing to it characteristics of specificity and peripherality. By way of contrast, equivalent works from Western creators are often discussed in universal terms.

It is evident that such placements engender epistemic injustice, manifesting as an inequitable devaluation of the users’ capacity for knowledge (Fricker, 2007). Epistemic injustice is defined as the wrongful treatment of individuals in their role as knowers, either by not being believed (testimonial) or by being unable to fully understand or express their experiences (hermeneutical), due to structural power imbalances. In AI systems, this injustice takes shape in the one-size-fits-all data categories, which circumscribe the comprehensibility of non-Western

cultural production, rendering it knowable only through the lens of otherness. As Linda Alcoff (1991) asserts, “speaking for others” constitutes a form of symbolic silencing.

The concept of ghetto culture has been a subject of analysis in the domain of cultural criticism, with scholars offering diverse perspectives on its implications. In his 1997 publication, Stuart Hall explored the concept of representational hegemony, which he defined as “dominant meanings, values, and standards that define the limits of the sayable” (Hall 1997, 99). Hall’s argument posits that cultural recognition does not inherently disrupt established hegemony; rather, it facilitates the reintegration of difference in a manner that serves to reinforce the prevailing social order. In a similar vein, Homi Bhabha (1994) expounded on the concept of cultural hybridity to elucidate how the marginalised subject is “included” solely through mimetic imitation of the prevailing culture. This imitation, however, is perpetually characterised by ambivalence and imbalance, never fully achieving complete assimilation. As Gilroy (1993) demonstrated in his seminal work *The Black Atlantic*, the notion of the “Black Atlantic” has been instrumental in highlighting the decontextualisation and disassociation of Black cultural expression from its political roots, even in cases where it has achieved global recognition, as evidenced by the examples of jazz, hip-hop and soul.

A more perspicuous way to conceptualise the “ghetto effect” in AI would be through Nancy Fraser’s (1990) concept of misrecognition, which posits that marginalised groups are incorporated solely on terms established by the dominant culture. Walter Mignolo’s (2005) concept of “epistemic coloniality” builds on this to indicate that such inclusion frequently occurs with the consequence of erasing or eliminating knowledge systems that do not align with the Western canon. This phenomenon elucidates the potential for the co-option of social movements, such as Black Lives Matter, and the subversion of Indigenous aesthetics in the fashion industry (Raheja 2010). Both cases illustrate that the pursuit of inclusion on unequal terms can, in fact, serve to exacerbate existing forms of exclusion. Within the paradigm of AI, the phenomenon of cultural difference diminishes in intensity concomitant with the scalability of digital platforms, which serve to standardise and decontextualise this difference, resulting in forms that seamlessly integrate into prevailing systems. In *The Googlization of Everything*, Siva Vaidhyanathan (2012) demonstrates that platform capitalism not only encourages but actively demands the flattening of cultural complexity into easily digestible content.

The prevailing digital manifestation of non-Western content functions within McRobbie’s (2009) concept of a “triple entanglement”, which extends the concept of “double entanglement.” This theoretical framework elucidates how ostensible cultural gains achieved by marginalised groups are undermined by more insidious forms of backlash or co-optation. This phenomenon introduces a third dimension: the infrastructural constraints of AI systems themselves. The tension is further exacerbated by aesthetic secessionism (cultural separatism masquerading as recog-

dition), its institutionalisation in cultural theory, and bell hooks' (2014) warning that the appropriation of difference undermines political critique by repackaging it as marketable content. AI does not merely reflect culture; rather, it reconstitutes it, frequently amplifying contradictions.

In order to combat epistemicide, it is essential to rely on reimaginings and reconfigurations of cultural infrastructures.

CULTURALLY INFORMED AI

A variety of projects, encompassing grassroots initiatives, artistic endeavours, and research-based studies, have sought to introduce alternative visions and practices. Two United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) initiatives are particularly notable for their institutional grounding and broad scope: The following publications provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of research in the field: "Protecting and Preserving Cultural Diversity in the Digital Era" (UNESCO 2020) and "Digital Initiatives for Indigenous Languages" (Llanes-Ortiz 2023). The former addresses the rapid expansion of digital technologies and their impact on the reshaping of culture, from its creation and distribution to access and preservation. The article focuses on the considerable promise and significant constraints that this expansion entails. The accessibility of cultural content created by web platforms, artificial intelligence (AI), virtual and augmented reality, and 5G networks (e.g. streams of theatre performances, virtual museum collections, remote engagement with cultural heritage) is highlighted, emphasising the uneven distribution of accessibility. As highlighted in the projects report (UNESCO 2020), only 53.6% of the global population currently has access to digital technologies. This indicates that approximately half of the global population remains marginalised in terms of accessing the opportunities presented by digital culture. The digital divide is most pronounced in the world's least economically developed countries, where digital penetration is as low as 19%, and gender disparities persist, with 12% fewer women than men using the internet globally. These inequalities carry profound implications for cultural production and consumption; for example, only 5% of museums in Africa and Small Island Developing States maintain an online presence, highlighting the risk that entire cultural sectors can be marginalised in the digital landscape.

The project also draws attention to the potential of digital technologies to safeguard cultural heritage, especially in situations involving conflict and disaster. During the course of the pandemic, there was a surge in digital engagement, with the Louvre Museum, for example, witnessing a ten-fold increase in web traffic as audiences migrated online. In contexts of destruction, UNESCO has utilised satellite imagery and three-dimensional documentation to assess damage and support recovery efforts in locations such as Aleppo, Syria. Furthermore, the organisation has conducted training programmes for heritage professionals

in Yemen and Iraq, equipping them with advanced tools including drones and photogrammetry for documentation purposes. Among the complex cultural risks exposed in this process is the threat of linguistic diversity, with just ten of the world's approximately 7,000 languages used to access 77% of the 1.8 billion websites online. A recent study has revealed that 95% of the global app market is concentrated in only 10 countries. This phenomenon gives rise to inequitable creative ecosystems, giving rise to questions around fair remuneration for creators, algorithmic control of cultural content, and the erosion of culture as a public good.

UNESCO also underscores the significance of inclusive public policies and global collaboration. The fundamental motivation underpinning their endeavours in this domain is the human right of equal access, in conjunction with the pressing concern of cultural misappropriation by digital instruments. The UNESCO project "Digital initiatives for Indigenous languages" (Llanes-Ortiz 2023) considers the relative merits and disadvantages of high technologies in comparison to non-digital forms. Its report "recommends posing a series of questions when determining which technological solutions could exert the greatest influence in relation to the community's revitalisation objectives.". According to Llanes-Ortiz (2023, 49), the project must include "clear and concrete steps to protect sensitive content from being [culturally] misappropriated".

This recommendation is predicated on the notion of strategic approaches to counteract digital misappropriation. These include facilitating, multiplying, normalising, educating, reclaiming, imagining, defending and protecting Indigenous languages in digital spaces. In the context of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032), this project underscores the imperative for digital literacy and self-directed content creation among communities for whom languages have been historically marginalised by dominant technologies and platforms. The practical elements of the course include case examples of digital activism, tools for expanding online presence (ranging from social media to educational resources), guidance for community-led projects, and suggestions for collaborative partnerships with technical experts and platforms. The toolkit provides unequivocal guidance on the matter of community agency: accountable digital efforts must be driven by Indigenous speakers, their priorities, and ethical considerations such as data sovereignty and cultural integrity.

One of the approaches to reversing the current approaches to digital content representation is the Geographically Inclusive Vision-and-Language project (GIVL). The project, which is anchored at the University of California, Los Angeles, positions geographic diversity as a structural dimension of multimodal representation learning. In summary, the project entails the development of an AI system capable of comprehending images and text in unison, with a particular focus on the unique visual characteristics of diverse global regions. The model employs two distinct training methodologies to facilitate the execution of vision-and-language tasks, such as describing images, responding to inquiries regarding these

images, and matching images with appropriate verbal descriptions. The first training method focuses on equipping the model with the capacity to establish connections between images and the relevant knowledge, including region-specific information. The second training method aims to enhance the model's ability to discern when visual similarities are deceptive and lead to erroneous inferences, particularly in contexts where cultural or local variations exist. The objective is to enhance the performance of AI in processing images from a diverse range of countries and cultures, extending beyond the scope of Western-focused datasets. The issue arises from the fact that visual categories are not universal; that is to say, significations and representations can vary according to geographical location. This is further compounded by the fact that many existing training datasets are imbalanced, with the result that AI systems are less effective for under-represented regions.

In the context of contemporary data science, there has been a growing recognition of the need to address the colonial and systemic biases inherent in data processing and analysis. This movement, often termed “decolonising data,” has been explored academically, particularly in the works of Coudry and Mejias (2019). In response to these calls for redress, Masakhane has emerged as a notable initiative. This grassroots African-led NLP (natural language processing) project aims to develop language models specifically for and within African languages, contributing to the revitalisation and empowerment of linguistic diversity on the continent (Orife et al. 2020). The Masakhane project is a continent-wide, open-source initiative with a focus on advancing neural machine translation (NMT) and broader natural language processing (NLP) for African languages. Its central tenet is the prioritisation of linguistic diversity in the pursuit of cultural representation veracity. The African continent is home to a plethora of languages, with over 2,000 different languages spoken across the region. However, this linguistic diversity is not reflected in research and technological development in natural language processing (NLP). Prior to the advent of Masakhane, linguistic resources, benchmarks, and publications for African languages were scarce, a situation compounded by limited funding, inadequate community infrastructure, the paucity of discoverability of extant work, and the linguistic complexity characteristic of many of these languages.

The project was initiated in 2019 with the objective of establishing an active research community focused on African Natural Language Processing (NLP), the creation of datasets and tools to facilitate research on low-resourced languages, and the establishment of best practices for distributed and inclusive research that can scale beyond the African continent. This initiative emerged from the grassroots movement of African AI researchers Deep Learning Indaba. The Masakhane approach has been developed to lower entry barriers: participants use an open-source platform with Jupyter Notebooks and free Google Colab GPUs to train and evaluate translation models, drawing on publicly available corpora such as the JW300 dataset, which includes parallel texts for

many African languages. As of February 2020, the community comprised 144 members from seventeen African nations and two nations outside the African continent, representing a range of educational attainment and professional backgrounds. Contributors published thirty translation results covering twenty-eight African languages on Masakhane's GitHub, enhancing reproducibility and community knowledge sharing. Notwithstanding these achievements, substantial obstacles persist. These include the paucity of language resources, the limitation of funding and infrastructure, and the inherent linguistic diversity and complexity of African languages, which challenge ongoing improvement and expansion of models.

In defining the tactics for decolonial AI and digital epistemic sovereignty, Mohamed, Png, and Isaac (2020, 684) mention "a strong need to develop new methodologies". For them, decolonial AI denotes an "inclusive dialogue between stakeholders in AI development, particularly those in which marginalised groups have meaningful avenues to influence the decision-making process, avoiding the potential for predatory inclusion and continued algorithmic oppression, exploitation and dispossession". Furthermore, the necessity for methodologies that can question algorithmic authority more broadly is implied, albeit not fully articulated.

Whilst scientific research has frequently encountered difficulties in embracing more open-ended modes of thinking, artistic and scientific practices have, for many years, functioned in accordance with such modes. The artistic practices informed by technological developments have long exposed the limitations of computational systems, including their biases and political ramifications. Indeed, artistic praxis has been instrumental in highlighting the manner in which algorithmic systems shape social perception and produce knowledge. A recent example of this phenomenon is *Justice Control Unit* by Przemysław Jasielski (2024). This media art installation examines the concept of algorithmic authority through a staged simulation of machine-driven justice. The work sets forth a speculative system that purports to evaluate an individual's propensity to perpetrate a criminal act. However, the criteria underpinning these judgments remain opaque, and the system's outcomes—electric shocks administered on the basis of factors such as race, gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity—appear arbitrary, despite being presented as the result of facial recognition analysis.

The interface of *Justice Control Unit* bears some resemblance to a legal or judicial device. However, the manner in which individuals engage with this medium is influenced by the findings of Stanley Milgram's obedience experiments, wherein participants were instructed by an authority figure to inflict harm upon others. This reference underscores a serious problem: there is an increasing tendency to delegate moral decisions to non-human systems that ostensibly remain neutral, despite the fact that they are founded on human assumptions, values, and biases. The objective of this project is to examine how advanced technologies en-

gender a paradox: moral judgment is displaced to a non-human entity, yet remains contingent on programmed rules that reflect social and political inequalities (Malinowska 2024). It has been demonstrated that these algorithmic systems do not eliminate bias; indeed, they frequently serve to reinforce it. Jasielski's installation has the capacity to render these hidden biases visible, thereby demonstrating the manner in which contemporary AI systems have the potential to perpetuate historical forms of racial, gender, ethnic, and other forms of injustice and discrimination, whilst presenting themselves as objective and purely technical.

Ruha Benjamin's *Race After Technology* (2019) critiques the deployment of algorithmic systems that perpetuate inequality under the pretext of impartiality. Benjamin signals the same problematic undercurrent of technological foresight through which present biases are projected forward and may solidify into future forms of inequality. She writes (2019, np):

By deliberately cultivating a solidaristic approach to design, it is necessary to consider that the technology that might be working just fine for some of us (at the present time) could harm or exclude others and that, even when the stakes seem trivial, a visionary ethos requires looking down the road to where things might be headed.

To combat the phenomenon of AI assimilationism it is necessary to engage with the expanding field of data feminism (D'Ignazio and Klein 2020), which advocates for intersectional approaches to data collection and algorithmic design. The Geographically Inclusive Vision-and-Language (GIVL) project, for instance, reflects this ethos by prioritising geographic diversity in AI training datasets. However, as D'Ignazio and Klein argue, technical solutions alone are insufficient without addressing the broader power structures that shape data infrastructures. In this context, the notion of "design justice" (Costanza-Chock 2020) is especially pertinent, as it emphasises the involvement of marginalised communities in the design process of technological systems. In a similar vein, the data sovereignty movements spearheaded by Indigenous scholars (Kukutai and Taylor 2016) present a paradigm for the reclamation of authority over cultural representation in digital domains.

However, even ambitious projects such as LATAM-GPT, which aims to develop language models trained on Latin American Spanish and Indigenous languages, reveal the complexities of resisting AI assimilationism (Lagos 2025). The initiative challenges the Anglophone bias of dominant AI systems by incorporating regional linguistic and cultural knowledge. However, its reliance on existing data infrastructures risks reproducing the very extractive logics it seeks to dismantle. In the absence of robust mechanisms for community governance and consent, such efforts may perpetuate technological dependency, resulting in the terms of inclusion being controlled by the very systems marginalised communities seek to challenge. In his analysis of *Justice Control Unit*, Przemysław Jasiel-

ski examines the phenomenon of algorithmic neutrality concealing entrenched power structures. The fundamental dilemma addressed in this study is the following: can such systems genuinely decolonise representation, or do they merely offer a more inclusive version of the same assimilative logic?

Justice Control Unit can be regarded as an artistic provocation. However, it can also be interpreted as a speculative exploration that reveals the fragility of the systems of belief that render such technologies legitimate. This gesture is connected to broader discourses concerning the social and political effects of surveillance technologies. As Jon Fasman (2021) observes, the expanding implementation of automated surveillance, encompassing facial recognition, license plate tracking, and predictive tools, gives rise to significant and as yet unresolved ethical concerns pertaining to privacy, personal autonomy, and civil liberties. These systems are frequently justified through claims of efficiency and technical performance, yet the rules they operate by are difficult to see, question, or challenge.

CONCLUSION

Despite the presence of commendable intentions and a multitude of meticulous initiatives, it appears that the phenomenon of AI assimilationism, with its subliminal tendencies towards ghettoisation, is a pattern that proves resilient and difficult to dismantle. After Benjamin, Arundhati Roy (2014, 25) pessimistically asserts “There is no alternative”. This sentiment is further compounded by the acknowledgement that endeavours to enhance visibility frequently entail an implicit expectation: that one should conform to prevailing modes of knowledge, nomenclature, and perception. The concept of inclusion has the capacity to subtly transform differences into something more familiar and manageable. Cultural specificity manifests as an aesthetic surface, while the capacity to define meaning is situated elsewhere.

This dynamic has been observed in a variety of settings: The integration of Eastern European digital art into overarching regional categories, the transformation of political struggles into consumable imagery, and the persistent misreading of non-Western bodies by automated systems are key themes that emerge from this analysis. In such cases, it can be argued that visibility is not neutral. The potential for distortion, simplification, and containment is evident.

As has been argued, AI assimilationism is sustained by a triple erasure: the silencing of linguistic nuances, the packaging of cultural difference as marketable exotica, and the entrenchment of inequalities under the guise of neutrality. This phenomenon does not represent the unavoidable cost of progress; rather, it is the consequence of regarding dominant technological paradigms as natural rather than constructed. The true challenge lies in transcending tokenistic inclusivity, where diversity is permitted only when it aligns with established norms. However, it is

important to note that the landscape is not static. A plethora of recent studies have indicated the emergence of fissures in the veneer of technological inevitability, as evidenced by a diverse array of phenomena. These include artistic interventions, grassroots datasets and decolonial design experiments. These alternatives do not merely resist assimilation; they reimagine the potential of AI if constructed from the ground up, with consideration for the communities it purports to represent.

The challenge lies in the implementation of these practices within broader infrastructures, educational systems, policy frameworks, and the quotidian mechanisms that discreetly orchestrate digital life. While the responses remain in a state of formulation, this objective appears to prioritise the dissolution of the centralised structure over the realignment of peripheral elements. As Ruha Benjamin reminds us, critique alone is not sufficient; it must be paired with creative reimagining. The argument advanced here is that the optimistic ending of her own work is to be rejected. The conclusion of the work states that “An emancipatory approach to technology entails an appreciation for the aesthetic dimensions of resisting the New Jim Code and a commitment to coupling our critique with creative alternatives that bring to life liberating and joyful ways of living in and organising our world” (2019, np).

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