

# REIMAGINING THE LIVING CONDITIONS IN AFRICA IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: HUMANITIES PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Ejikemeuwa J. O. NDUBISI, PhD

Department of Philosophy

Tansian University, Umuanya, Anambra State, Nigeria.

ejikon4u@yahoo.com; ejo.ndubisi@tansianuniversity.edu.ng; +2348062912017

## Abstract

*This paper critically examines the reconfiguration of living conditions in Africa within the emerging age of Artificial Intelligence (AI) from a humanities perspective. Moving beyond reductionist economic and technological metrics, it conceptualizes living conditions as encompassing dignity, cultural meaning, social relations, and moral agency. Situated within Africa's historical experience of precolonial technological integration, colonial disruption, and postcolonial dependency, the study interrogates AI not as a neutral innovation but as a socio-technical system embedded with external epistemologies, values, and power structures. It argues that uncritical adoption of AI risks reinforcing digital colonialism, cultural marginalization, and social inequality, particularly through algorithmic bias, linguistic exclusion, and the restructuring of work, education, and governance. Drawing on African philosophical traditions that emphasize relationality, community, and ethical personhood, the paper highlights the tension between computational rationality and humanistic values. It further explores the cultural implications of AI, including the threat of homogenization and the erosion of indigenous knowledge systems, while also recognizing the potential for creative adaptation and renewal. Central to the argument is the indispensable role of the Arts and Humanities in providing critical, interpretive, and imaginative frameworks for engaging AI. The study proposes a humanistic vision of AI grounded in African cultural contexts, advocating for epistemic sovereignty, inclusive technological design, and socially responsive innovation. It concludes that the future of AI in Africa must be guided by ethical reflection and cultural consciousness to ensure that technological advancement enhances human flourishing, preserves identity, and promotes social justice. The study adopts philosophical methods of phenomenology and hermeneutics.*

**Keywords:** Living Conditions, Africa, Artificial Intelligence, Culture, Society, Humanities

## I. Introduction

Too often, discussions of Africa's living conditions are reduced to economic statistics, development indices, or technological deficits. While such indicators are not

insignificant, they are radically insufficient. Living conditions are not exhausted by income levels, infrastructure, or access to devices; they encompass the quality of human existence itself: how people find meaning, preserve dignity, sustain community, and imagine their future. From humanities perspective, to speak of living conditions is to speak of culture, values, symbols, language, memory, and social relations. It is to ask not merely *how Africans live*, but *how Africans ought to live* in a rapidly transforming world.

Africa today stands at a critical historical threshold. Having endured the long shadows of colonial disruption and the ambiguities of postcolonial modernity, the continent now encounters a new civilizational force in the form of Artificial Intelligence. AI arrives not as a neutral tool but as a carrier of assumptions, values, and power relations embedded in data, algorithms, and institutional interests largely external to African societies. The challenge before us, therefore, is not simply whether Africa will adopt AI technologies but whether this adoption will occur uncritically, reproducing old patterns of dependency and marginalization, or reflectively, guided by Africa's own cultural resources and social aspirations.

It is at this juncture that the Arts and Humanities become indispensable. Philosophy, history, literature, linguistics, religious studies, and the broader field of African Studies provide the conceptual tools needed to interrogate the meanings, implications, and ethical horizons of AI. They remind us that technological progress divorced from cultural understanding and moral reflection can impoverish rather than improve human life. To reimagine living conditions in Africa in the age of AI, therefore, is not first a technical task but a humanistic one. It requires us to ask how intelligent machines intersect with African conceptions of personhood, community, justice, and the good life. This study proceeds from the conviction that Africa's future with AI must be shaped not only by engineers and policymakers, but also, and perhaps more fundamentally, by thinkers, artists, and cultural scholars who can articulate a vision of technological development anchored in human flourishing.

## **II. Africa and Technology: A Brief Historical and Philosophical Context**

Any serious attempt to reimagine living conditions in Africa in the age of Artificial Intelligence must be situated within a broader historical and philosophical understanding of Africa's relationship with technology. Technology does not enter societies as an abstract or value-neutral phenomenon; it arrives embedded within historical trajectories, power relations, and cultural meanings. To understand Africa's present encounter with AI, we must first recall that Africa has never been technologically barren, despite persistent narratives to the contrary.

Precolonial African societies developed sophisticated technologies suited to their ecological, social, and spiritual environments. From iron smelting and metallurgy in Nok, Meroe, and Igbo-Ukwu, to complex systems of agriculture, medicine,

architecture, and governance, technology in traditional African contexts was deeply integrated into communal life and moral order.<sup>1</sup> Knowledge was not divorced from ethics, and technical skill was embedded within cosmology, ritual, and social responsibility. Technology, in this sense, was not merely instrumental but relational; it served human life within a network of social and spiritual meanings.

Colonialism, however, introduced a radical rupture in Africa's technological history. European colonial powers did not merely impose foreign technologies; they imposed a new *logic* of technology, one oriented towards extraction, domination, and control.<sup>2</sup> Indigenous knowledge systems were systematically devalued, while Western science and technology were presented as universal, superior, and culturally neutral. This epistemic displacement produced a lasting alienation: Africans became users rather than authors of dominant technological paradigms. The colonial encounter thus transformed technology from a culturally grounded practice into an external force associated with authority and progress defined elsewhere.

In the postcolonial period, African societies inherited this fractured technological consciousness. Modern technologies, industrial machinery, information systems, and later digital tools, were largely imported, often without corresponding philosophical reflection on their cultural and social implications. Development discourse emphasized catching up, modernization, and technological transfer, frequently sidelining questions of meaning, identity, and ethical fit.<sup>3</sup> As a result, technology became associated with advancement but also with dependency, reinforcing structural inequalities within the global order.

Artificial Intelligence represents a new and intensified phase of this historical pattern. Unlike earlier technologies, AI operates at the level of cognition, decision-making, and meaning production. It processes language, images, and social behaviour: domains traditionally associated with human reason and cultural expression.<sup>4</sup> For Africa, this raises profound philosophical questions: If technologies now shape how knowledge is produced and validated, whose knowledge counts? If algorithms mediate social life, whose values are encoded within them? AI thus confronts Africa not merely with a technological challenge but with an epistemic and cultural one.

<sup>1</sup> Innocent A. Asouzu, *Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2007), 45–48.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972), 205–210.

<sup>3</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965), 239–242.

<sup>4</sup> Luciano Floridi, *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere Is Reshaping Human Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 87–92; E. J. O. Ndubisi, “**Artificial Intelligence and Management of African Cultural Heritage: Towards Economic Growth and Development**”, *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*, Vol. 7, No. 5 (2024), 173 - 174.

From a philosophical standpoint, the danger lies not simply in exclusion from AI development, but in uncritical inclusion, participating in systems that subtly reconfigure African realities according to external categories and priorities.<sup>5</sup> Without historical consciousness, AI risks becoming a continuation of technological dependence by other means, what some scholars have described as a form of *digital colonialism*.<sup>6</sup> Yet history also offers resources for resistance and creativity. Africa's long tradition of adaptive appropriation, absorbing external influences while reworking them within local frameworks, suggests that another path is possible.

The task before us, therefore, is to recover a reflective posture towards technology, one that acknowledges Africa's past experiences while critically engaging present possibilities. AI must be approached not as an inevitable destiny but as a human creation open to reinterpretation and redirection. Such reinterpretation requires the humanities: disciplines capable of situating AI within historical memory, philosophical reasoning, and cultural self-understanding. Only by grounding technological engagement in this broader context can Africa begin to reimagine living conditions that are not merely technologically enhanced, but culturally meaningful and humanly enriching.

### III. Artificial Intelligence: A Humanistic Clarification

Public discourse on Artificial Intelligence is often characterized by a tension between exaggeration and opacity. On the one hand, AI is celebrated in almost messianic terms as the ultimate solution to human problems; on the other, it is portrayed as an existential threat poised to eclipse human agency. Both tendencies obscure what is most philosophically significant about AI: that it is not merely a collection of machines or algorithms, but a socio-technical system embedded within human intentions, institutional structures, and cultural assumptions. From a humanistic standpoint, the crucial question is not simply *what AI can do*, but *what AI means* for human self-understanding and social life.

At its most basic level, Artificial Intelligence refers to computational systems designed to perform tasks that ordinarily require human cognitive capacities such as learning, pattern recognition, language processing, and decision-making.<sup>7</sup> Yet this functional description is insufficient for humanities inquiry. AI does not merely imitate

<sup>5</sup>Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (London: Routledge, 2018), 113–118.

<sup>6</sup>Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, & Ogochukwu Agatha Okpokwasili, "Artificial Intelligence And Digital Colonialism In Africa" *Igwebuike: African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 11 No. 7 (2025), 2 – 13; Pandey, S., Smis, S. Digital Colonisation in Africa: Continuities of Colonial Exploitation Through Knowledge Production. In: Ashukem, J.C.N. (eds) Handbook on Business, Human Rights, and the Environment in Africa. Springer, Cham. (2025). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-03261-4\\_19](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-03261-4_19); J. O. Effoduh Digital Colonialism and the Role of Local Intermediaries: Examining Big Tech's Impact on Data Sovereignty and Human Rights in Africa. (2025). *Business and Human Rights Journal*. 2025;10(2-3):301-317. doi:10.1017/bhj.2025.10021;

<sup>7</sup>E. J. O. Ndubisi, "Artificial Intelligence in Personalised Learning: Enhancing Research Integrity" in *AI and Ethics, Academic Integrity and the Future of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Handbook on Artificial Intelligence and Quality Higher Education, Vol3* edited by Peter A. Okebukola, (Slough, UK: Sterling Publishers, 2025), 120; B. C. Uzozie and V. G. Onwudinjo, "Africa in the age of AI: A Philosophical Inquest into the future of technology and human dignity" in E. J. O. Ndubisi, I. A. Kanu, N. D. Ulogu, K. L. Nwadior, J. N. Adamu (Eds.), *Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, And Indigenous Wisdom: Rethinking Africa's Cultural And Philosophical Future* (Maryland, USA: Association for the Promotion of African Studies, 2025), 36.

<sup>8</sup>Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019), 198–201.

intelligence; it reshapes how intelligence itself is defined, measured, and valued.<sup>8</sup> When algorithms are treated as neutral arbiters of efficiency or truth, they quietly redefine rationality in terms of calculability, speed, and optimization, often at the expense of wisdom, moral judgment, and contextual understanding.

For African societies, this redefinition carries particular significance. Intelligence, in many African philosophical traditions, is not conceived as an isolated mental property but as a relational and ethical capacity expressed in prudence, communal responsibility, and moral sensitivity. Discussing Igwebuike epistemology, Ikechukwu Kanu observed that “life is a relationship, and it is only within this relationship that knowledge and life itself are possible”.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, to speak of artificial intelligence in this context invites critical reflection: Can intelligence be separated from moral agency? Can cognition be abstracted from lived experience, history, and culture? These are not technical questions; they are philosophical ones, and they expose the limitations of importing AI concepts without cultural interrogation.

Moreover, AI systems are trained on data, language, images, texts, and behavioural patterns, drawn from specific social contexts. As a result, they carry the biases, silences, and power structures of those contexts.<sup>10</sup> In a global digital environment dominated by Western epistemologies and languages, African realities are often underrepresented, misrepresented, or rendered invisible. This has profound implications for culture and society. When African names, accents, histories, and value systems are absent or distorted in AI systems, technological participation becomes a subtle form of cultural marginalization.

From a humanities perspective, it is therefore misleading to treat AI as culturally neutral. Algorithms are forms of interpretation; they classify, prioritize, and assign meaning.<sup>11</sup> In doing so, they shape social outcomes: who gets access to resources, whose voices are amplified, and which forms of knowledge are legitimized. This interpretive power places AI within the long history of tools that mediate human understanding, alongside writing, print, and digital media. What distinguishes AI, however, is its capacity to automate interpretation itself, raising urgent questions about authority, responsibility, and accountability.

<sup>8</sup>Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019), 198–201

<sup>9</sup>I. A. Kanu, “Igwebuike Epistemology: Towards A Decolonized Theory Of Knowledge”, *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*. Vol. 6, No. 1, (2023), 5.

<sup>10</sup>Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 10–15.

<sup>11</sup> Aizada Tursunaliyeva, et al., “Making Sense of Machine Learning: A Review of Interpretation Techniques and Their Applications,” *Applied Sciences* 14, no. 2 (2024): 512.; Christoph Molnar, *Interpretable Machine Learning*, 2nd ed. (2024), retrieved from: <https://christophm.github.io/interpretable-ml-book/> (accessed: 14:01:2026); James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 77–82.

A humanistic clarification of AI also requires resisting the temptation to frame technological progress as inevitable. The language of inevitability often serves to foreclose ethical debate, suggesting that societies must adapt rather than deliberate.<sup>12</sup> Yet AI systems are designed, deployed, and governed by human choices. Recognizing this restores moral agency and opens space for alternative imaginaries particularly African imaginaries grounded in communal ethics, historical memory, and social solidarity.

In this light, Artificial Intelligence should be approached not as a destiny imposed upon Africa, but as a phenomenon to be critically interpreted and culturally situated. The task of the Arts and Humanities is precisely this: to render visible the assumptions embedded in AI, to question the values it promotes, and to ensure that technological development remains accountable to human flourishing. Without such clarification, AI risks becoming another instrument through which Africa experiences the future as something that happens *to* it rather than something it actively shapes.

#### IV. The African Cultural Question in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Culture is not an ornamental aspect of social life; it is the deep structure through which societies interpret reality, transmit values, and sustain collective identity. In African contexts, culture encompasses language, kinship systems, moral codes, artistic expressions, religious sensibilities, and historical memory. Any attempt to reimagine living conditions in Africa in the age of Artificial Intelligence must therefore confront what may be called *the African cultural question*: how emerging technologies interact with, transform, or potentially displace the symbolic and normative worlds through which African societies make sense of themselves.

One of the most significant cultural risks posed by AI is algorithmic homogenization. Digital platforms and AI-driven systems tend to privilege dominant languages, standardized expressions, and globally marketable cultural forms.<sup>13</sup> African languages, many of which are primarily oral and context-dependent, face marginalization within data-driven environments that prioritize textual abundance and computational efficiency. When language is excluded, culture follows. The erosion of indigenous languages through digital neglect is not merely a linguistic loss; it represents a contraction of worldview, memory, and moral imagination.

Beyond language, AI reshapes cultural practices by subtly reordering attention, taste, and value. Recommendation algorithms influence what music is heard, what stories are told, and which images circulate. In doing so, they risk displacing local aesthetic traditions with globalized cultural products optimized for visibility rather than meaning.<sup>14</sup> For African societies with rich artistic and narrative heritages, this raises urgent questions about cultural continuity. Will AI amplify African creativity on African

<sup>12</sup>Langdon Winner, *The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 6–9.

<sup>13</sup>Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986), 16–20.

<sup>14</sup>Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94–98.

terms, or will it assimilate it into homogenized global circuits that dilute its distinctive character? The cultural question also extends to indigenous knowledge systems. Traditional African knowledge, relating to medicine, agriculture, conflict resolution, and environmental stewardship, is often communal, experiential, and transmitted orally across generations.<sup>15</sup> Such knowledge does not easily conform to the data structures favoured by AI systems. When AI-driven development initiatives ignore these epistemic forms, they risk not only inefficiency but cultural alienation. Conversely, uncritical digitization of indigenous knowledge raises ethical concerns about ownership, consent, and exploitation. Who controls African cultural data, and for whose benefit is it deployed?

From a philosophical perspective, culture shapes not only *what* a society values but *how* it understands intelligence itself. African conceptions of personhood emphasize relationality, mutual recognition, and moral embeddedness.<sup>16</sup> Intelligence is expressed not merely in problem-solving capacity but in wisdom, character, and social harmony. AI systems, by contrast, operationalize intelligence in terms of performance metrics and optimization functions. This disjunction invites critical interrogation: What happens when a technologically mediated understanding of intelligence begins to dominate social institutions such as education, governance, and work? The danger is not that machines become intelligent, but that humans are compelled to conform to machine-like norms.

Yet the African cultural question is not solely defensive. It is also generative. African cultures have historically demonstrated remarkable capacity for adaptation, synthesis, and creative reinterpretation. The encounter with AI, therefore, need not result in cultural erasure. It can become an opportunity for cultural renewal if approached deliberately. This requires intentional inclusion of African languages, symbols, narratives, and ethical frameworks in AI design and deployment. It also demands that artists, writers, philosophers, and cultural scholars participate actively in shaping technological imaginaries, rather than responding to them belatedly.<sup>17</sup>

To reimagine living conditions in Africa in the age of AI is thus to insist that culture remains central, not peripheral. Technology must serve as a medium through which African societies express and extend their values, not as an instrument that quietly redefines them. The task before us is to ensure that AI becomes a site of cultural articulation rather than cultural displacement, a space where Africa speaks in its own voices, remembers its past, and projects its future on its own terms.

<sup>15</sup> E. J. O. Ndubisi and C. V. Ogboo, "African Indigenous Education in Contemporary Society" in *African Indigenous Knowledge System: Problems and Prospects* edited by I. A. Kanu and E. J. O. Ndubisi, Pp. 1 – 19. Yola: Altograde Nigeria Limited, 2020; Paulin J. Hountondji, *Endogenous Knowledge: Research Trails* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1997), 29–34.

<sup>16</sup> Kwame Gyekye, *Person and Community in African Thought* (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), 101–105; E. J. O. Ndubisi, and I. A. Kanu, "Artificial Intelligence and Socio-economic Development in Africa". *Ochendo: An African Journal of Innovative Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1, (2022), 2 – 21.

<sup>17</sup> E. J. O. Ndubisi, "Artificial Intelligence and Management of African Cultural Heritage: Towards Economic Growth and Development", *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*, Vol. 7, No. 5 (2024), 173 - 174.

## V. Artificial Intelligence, Society, and the African Human Condition

If culture provides the symbolic framework through which societies interpret reality, then society represents the concrete arena in which those interpretations are lived out. The impact of Artificial Intelligence on Africa must therefore be assessed not in abstract terms, but in relation to the African human condition understood as the lived experience of individuals and communities shaped by historical vulnerability, social resilience, and persistent struggles for dignity. From a humanities perspective, the decisive question is not whether AI can improve efficiency, but whether it can contribute to a more humane social order.

African societies are already marked by deep social and economic inequalities rooted in colonial histories and postcolonial structural constraints. AI enters this landscape not as a neutral equalizer, but as a force that can either mitigate or intensify existing disparities. Access to AI technologies is unevenly distributed along lines of class, geography, education, and gender. Urban centres with digital infrastructure benefit disproportionately, while rural communities risk further marginalization.<sup>18</sup> In this context, AI threatens to produce a new form of social stratification, one based not only on wealth, but on algorithmic visibility and data inclusion. Moreover, AI systems deployed in governance, finance, and security increasingly mediate access to social goods. When such systems are designed without sensitivity to African social realities, they may exclude those whose lives do not conform to standardized data categories.<sup>19</sup> The result is a paradox: technologies intended to rationalize social services may deepen social invisibility for the most vulnerable. A humanistic approach insists that social justice must precede technological optimization, not the other way around.

More so, few issues provoke as much anxiety as the relationship between AI and work. In Africa, where large segments of the population depend on informal economies, subsistence labour, and communal forms of productivity, dominant narratives of automation often misrepresent social realities.<sup>20</sup> AI-driven models of work tend to privilege formal employment structures, rendering informal labour invisible or obsolete. This raises critical questions about the future of livelihoods and the social meaning of work. From a philosophical perspective, work is not merely a means of survival; it is a site of self-expression, social recognition, and dignity. African moral traditions emphasize the value of contribution to communal life rather than productivity measured in abstract economic terms. If AI systems redefine work solely in terms of efficiency and profitability, they risk undermining these moral foundations. The

<sup>18</sup>Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), 69–73.

<sup>19</sup>Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2018), 15–19.

<sup>20</sup>Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 57–60.

challenge, therefore, is to imagine AI applications that support human labour, enhance creativity, and respect the social significance of work rather than displacing it wholesale.

On another note, education occupies a central place in the reimagining of living conditions, as it shapes how societies understand themselves and their future. AI-driven educational tools promise expanded access, personalized learning, and improved efficiency.<sup>21</sup> Yet they also raise profound questions about intellectual formation. When educational content and assessment systems are driven by external platforms, there is a danger of cognitive dependency where African learners consume knowledge without participating in its production.<sup>22</sup> The humanities play a crucial role in resisting this tendency. Education, properly understood, is not the accumulation of information but the cultivation of judgment, imagination, and critical reasoning. AI can assist learning, but it cannot replace the dialogical and interpretive processes through which the African mind is formed. A society that outsources thinking to machines risks losing the capacity for self-reflection essential to democratic and cultural life.

It is also important to note at this point that African societies have historically placed strong emphasis on communal bonds, mutual care, and shared responsibility. AI-mediated communication and social platforms, while expanding connectivity, can also fragment social life by prioritizing virtual interaction over embodied community.<sup>23</sup> The danger lies not in technology itself, but in the gradual reconfiguration of social relations toward individualism and abstraction. From a humanities perspective, the question is how AI can be integrated in ways that strengthen rather than erode communal life. Technologies must be evaluated in terms of their impact on trust, solidarity, and social cohesion. Living conditions improve not merely when systems become smarter, but when communities become more humane.

In sum, the encounter between AI and African society reveals a fundamental tension between technological rationality and human meaning. To address this tension, Africa must place the human condition, rather than technological novelty, at the centre of social transformation. AI should be judged not by its sophistication, but by its capacity to enhance dignity, reduce inequality, and sustain the social bonds upon which meaningful life depends.

<sup>21</sup>E. J. O. Ndubisi, "Artificial Intelligence in Personalised Learning: Enhancing Research Integrity" in *AI and Ethics, Academic Integrity and the Future of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Handbook on Artificial Intelligence and Quality Higher Education, Vol 3* edited by Peter A. Okebukola, 119 – 126. Slough, UK: Sterling Publishers, 2025.

<sup>22</sup>Remi Alapo, Isaiah Z. Chabala, and colleagues, "Knowledge Production Beyond Coloniality: Epistemic Sovereignty in African and Afro-Diasporic Institutions," *Philosophy Study* 15, no. 4 (2025), 205–220; Leonie Schoelen, Abbas Sebihi, Sherif Azab-El, and Mariame Sano, "Diversity of Epistemologies in African Higher Education: An Interdisciplinary Perspective on the Contribution of Digital Communities of Practice to Equitable Knowledge Production," *Curriculum Perspectives* 43 (2023), 117–125.; Emmet Tadesse Woldegiorgis, "Hybrid Knowledge Systems: An Alternative Pathway to Decolonising Higher Education in Africa," *Comparative Education* 61, no. 3 (2025): 354–372; Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970), 72–75.

<sup>23</sup>Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 8–10.

## VI. Reimagining Living Conditions: Towards an African Humanistic AI Vision

The pertinent question now is: *How can Africa reimagine its living conditions in the age of AI without surrendering its humanity, cultural integrity, and moral agency?* Reimagination here does not mean technological utopianism; it denotes a deliberate act of intellectual and moral reconstruction grounded in African historical experience and humanistic values. To reimagine living conditions is first to redefine development itself. For too long, development in Africa has been framed in terms of technological acquisition and economic growth measured by external standards. Yet from a humanistic perspective, development must be evaluated by its contribution to human flourishing, understood as the capacity of individuals and communities to live meaningful, dignified, and socially embedded lives.<sup>24</sup> AI, therefore, should not be pursued as an end in itself, but as a means towards enhancing wellbeing, cultural vitality, and social justice.

A humanistic AI vision for Africa must be culturally grounded. This entails embedding African languages, narratives, symbols, and value systems into digital environments. Language is not merely a tool of communication; it is a carrier of worldview. When African languages are excluded from AI systems, African ways of seeing the world are diminished.<sup>25</sup> Reimagining living conditions thus involves intentional investment in linguistic inclusion, cultural datasets, and creative technologies that allow African cultures to speak for themselves rather than be spoken for by others. Such a vision must also be socially responsive. AI applications in health, education, agriculture, and governance should be designed with sensitivity to African social realities, including communal life, informal economies, and extended family systems. Technologies that ignore these contexts risk deepening alienation. Conversely, AI systems that are co-created with local communities can support social resilience, enhance service delivery, and strengthen trust between institutions and citizens. Participation, rather than passive consumption, is therefore central to a humane technological future.

Education occupies a pivotal role in this reimagination. African universities must not only teach how to use AI, but how to *think about* AI.<sup>26</sup> The humanities are indispensable in this regard, as they cultivate ethical reasoning, historical consciousness, and critical imagination.<sup>27</sup> A society that understands technology only instrumentally lacks the conceptual resources to guide it wisely. Reimagining living conditions therefore requires re-centering the humanities within digital transformation, not as an afterthought but as a guiding framework.

<sup>24</sup>Martha C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 18–24.

<sup>25</sup>Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 87–90; Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, & Ogochukwu Agatha Okpokwasili, "Artificial Intelligence And Digital Colonialism In Africa" *Igwebuike: African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 11 No. 7 (2025), 2–13;

<sup>26</sup>Sixbert Sangwa, Simeon Nsabiye, Dennis Ngobi, and Placide Mutabazi, "Ethical AI Integration in African Higher Education: Enhancing Research Supervision, Grant Discovery, and Proposal Writing Without Compromising Academic Integrity," *International Journal of Human Research and Social Science Studies* 2, no. 6 (2025): 402–410

<sup>27</sup>Caitlin C. Corrigan, Simon Atuah Asakipaam, Jerry John Kponyo, and Christoph Luetge, eds., *AI Ethics in Higher Education: Insights from Africa and Beyond* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2023).

Equally important is the moral orientation of AI governance. African humanistic values emphasize care for the vulnerable, communal responsibility, and restorative justice. These values must inform policies on data governance, algorithmic accountability, and technological deployment. Living conditions improve not when systems become more autonomous, but when human responsibility becomes more deliberate. AI must remain answerable to human judgment, particularly in contexts where its decisions affect access to life opportunities.

## VII. The Role of the Arts and Humanities in Africa's AI Future

At moments of profound civilizational change, societies instinctively turn to their artists, philosophers, historians, and storytellers not for technical solutions, but for meaning. The rise of Artificial Intelligence represents such a moment. While engineers design systems and policymakers regulate their use, it is the Arts and Humanities that interrogate the assumptions behind these systems, articulate their implications, and envision alternative futures. In Africa's encounter with AI, the humanities are not peripheral commentators; they are central agents of interpretation and direction.

The humanities perform, first, a **critical function**. They expose the narratives that accompany technological innovation: narratives of inevitability, neutrality, and progress, and subject them to scrutiny.<sup>28</sup> When we ask pertinent questions as who benefits, who is excluded, and whose values are embedded in AI systems, the humanities resist the depoliticization of technology. This critical posture is especially important in African contexts, where historical experiences of domination caution against unexamined claims of universalism. Without such critique, AI risks becoming another arena in which power operates invisibly.

Second, the humanities perform an **interpretive function**. Technologies do not speak for themselves; they acquire meaning through language, symbols, and social practices. Literature, philosophy, history, and religious studies help societies interpret technological change within longer moral and cultural narratives.<sup>29</sup> They situate AI within questions of identity, memory, and destiny. For Africa, this interpretive work ensures that technological adoption does not result in cultural amnesia, but is woven into a continuous story of who Africans have been and who they aspire to become.

Third, the humanities serve an **imaginative function**. Before societies build futures, they imagine them. African literature, visual arts, music, and performance traditions have long articulated visions of resistance, resilience, and renewal. In the age of AI, these creative forms can challenge dominant technological imaginaries and propose alternative possibilities rooted in African social realities.<sup>30</sup> Imagination, in this sense, is not escapism; it is a form of anticipatory ethics, enabling societies to envision humane futures before they are foreclosed by technical momentum.

<sup>28</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 85–88.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 52–56.

<sup>30</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 173–177.

The humanities also play a vital role in **education and leadership formation**. Universities that marginalize the humanities in favour of purely technical training risk producing graduates who can build systems without understanding their social consequences. African higher education must resist this imbalance. The formation of responsible technological leadership requires historical consciousness, ethical reasoning, and cultural literacy, capacities cultivated most deeply within the humanities.<sup>31</sup> Reimagining living conditions therefore entails reimagining curricula that integrate technological competence with humanistic wisdom.

Finally, the humanities are essential to the pursuit of **epistemic justice**. They defend the plurality of ways of knowing against the reduction of knowledge to data and computation. African Studies, in particular, affirms the legitimacy of African experiences, philosophies, and intellectual traditions within global conversations about technology.<sup>32</sup> In doing so, it resists the subtle erasure that occurs when technological futures are imagined without Africa at the centre of their concern.

In sum, the Arts and Humanities are not obstacles to Africa's technological advancement; they are its conscience and compass. They remind us that the ultimate question raised by Artificial Intelligence is not how intelligent our machines become, but how human our societies remain. If Africa is to reimagine its living conditions in the age of AI, it must do so with the humanities at the helm, guiding innovation with wisdom, anchoring progress in culture, and ensuring that the future remains answerable to human values.

### VIII. Conclusion: A Call to Intellectual and Cultural Responsibility

As we reflect on Africa's encounter with Artificial Intelligence, we arrive at a singular insight: the future of technology in Africa is inseparable from the future of African humanity. AI, for all its computational sophistication, is neither destiny nor deity; it is a human creation, and as such, it remains accountable to human judgment, wisdom, and moral imagination.<sup>33</sup> The question is not whether AI will arrive in Africa - it already has - but whether its arrival will enhance human flourishing, strengthen cultural integrity, and advance social justice, or whether it will reproduce historical patterns of dependency, exclusion, and epistemic marginalization.

Reimagining living conditions in Africa in this age requires more than technological competence; it demands **cultural literacy, ethical discernment, and historical**

<sup>31</sup> Caitlin C. Corrigan, Simon Atuah Asakipaam, Jerry John Kponyo, and Christoph Luetge, eds., *AI Ethics in Higher Education: Insights from Africa and Beyond* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2023); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 129–133.

<sup>32</sup> Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings, *Africanizing Knowledge: African Studies across the Disciplines* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 11–15.

<sup>33</sup> Luciano Floridi, *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere Is Reshaping Human Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 102–107.

**consciousness.** African societies must engage AI not as passive consumers but as active shapers of the technological, moral, and social landscapes in which they live.<sup>34</sup> This entails asserting epistemic sovereignty, embedding African languages and values in AI systems, and ensuring that technological innovation advances dignity, solidarity, and community. It also entails cultivating citizens, scholars, and leaders who can integrate technical proficiency with the interpretive and ethical capacities honed by the Arts and Humanities.

The humanities, in particular, serve as Africa's compass in navigating this new terrain. Philosophy, literature, history, and cultural studies illuminate the assumptions behind technological systems, situate them within longer human narratives, and envision alternative futures that remain accountable to human and social well-being. African thinkers and institutions have a central role to play in shaping AI imaginaries, translating ethical principles into concrete policies, and ensuring that progress is measured not by computational efficiency, but by human flourishing and cultural vitality.

In the end, the challenge is a call to responsibility: intellectual, moral, and cultural. African societies are tasked with steering technology toward purposes that honour both our history and our aspirations. AI must serve humanity, not the reverse; it must amplify human dignity, not erode it. The responsibility lies with scholars, policymakers, artists, educators, and citizens alike. Through reclaiming agency over technology, embedding it in African cultural and ethical frameworks, and cultivating humanistic wisdom alongside computational innovation, Africa can reimagine living conditions that are equitable, meaningful, and life-affirming.

Finally, let us not allow the allure of novelty to eclipse the imperatives of justice, culture, and human dignity. Let us instead commit, collectively and creatively, to a future in which Africa's encounter with AI strengthens its humanity, honours its cultures, and advances the well-being of its people. The age of Artificial Intelligence is not merely a technological era; it is a moral and cultural moment. Africa's response will define the character of its living conditions for generations to come.

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<sup>34</sup>Emnet Tadesse Woldegiorgis, "Hybrid Knowledge Systems: An Alternative Pathway to Decolonising Higher Education in Africa," *Comparative Education* 61, no. 3 (2025): 354–372; Remi Alapo, Isaiah Z. Chabala, et al., "Knowledge Production Beyond Coloniality: Epistemic Sovereignty in African and Afro-Diasporic Institutions," *Philosophy Study* 15, no. 4 (2025): 205–220; Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (London: Routledge, 2018), 53–58.

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