



**BLACK PEOPLE IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:
RESISTING THE PROGRESSIVE ARTIFICIALITY OF HUMAN LIFE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

IT IS A WIDE-SPREAD SHARED CONCEPTION that our future is under surveillance and siege, that our present is problematized by big tech, artificial intelligence, and continuing cultural wars. These toxic and toll-taking processes strive to rewrite and erase our history and offer us a false freedom instead of liberation; devices and gadgets instead of justice; and narrow notions of progress privileging the ruling racial elite instead of offering a shared inclusive good for everyone. And the critical question for us as a people is how do we rightfully respond to this problematic context and meet the requirements to radically transform it in the interests of African and human good and the well-being of the world? I want to state at the onset that whatever new and critical challenges we face, this is our continuing and unavoidable duty: *to know our past and honor it, to engage our present and improve it, and to imagine a whole new future and forge it in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways.*

Clearly, one of the most defining features of this era is the rapid rise of technological innovation and deployment, culminating in the current focus and concerns around artificial intelligence. It has not only changed the means and quality of our communication, but also educational and learning practices, governmental processes, consumption patterns and practices, and how we see ourselves and relate to each other, different others and the natural world. And given this overwhelming and pervasive impact, there are tendencies to call the simple presence of technology progress, implying a move forward for everyone and in the most progressive ways. But its purpose, research, design, production and deployment are too often not reflective of the freedom, justice, equity and shared good we still struggle for, demand and deserve.

We don't have to be a socialist to know that the aims and interests of the owners and developers of these technologies are not the same as those of the masses of people. Indeed, as history and current realities reaffirm, their pursuit of profit and control obviously goes against our irreversible commitment to freedom, justice and other shared goods in the world. Therefore, it is important that we constantly and courageously question the conception, development and use of technology. For we know with Nana Dr. Martin Luther King that we must work and struggle to "bridge the gulf between our scientific progress and our moral progress," as a society and world.

Pursuing that reasoning and moral concern, what I would like to do is pose the problematic as one of not only how to meet the social and ethical challenges of big tech and artificial intelligence, but also of how can we resist the progressive artificiality of human life, human learning, and African and human liberation? What I mean here is that artificial intelligence is preceded and made possible and most prominent by the progressive artificiality of much of our lives in terms of our relations with each other, with others and with the natural world, marked by a profound and continuously progressing self-, social and natural alienation. In a word, it speaks to the progressive erosion of quality relations which ground and define our humanity.

The artificiality of life speaks to the Kawaida conception of life as naturally free, internally directed towards growth, development, flourishing and coming-into-the-fullness of ourselves. It, thus, sees oppression and unfreedom as unnatural and pathological. And thus, we talk of the pathology of oppression, the pathological and pathogenic character of this system of oppression, and the unnaturalness of unfreedom, whether from

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suppression, seduction or deceptive domination. As Nana Anna Julia Cooper states, “We take our stand on the solidarity of humanity, the oneness of life and the unnaturalness of all favoritisms whether of sex, race, country or condition.”

Surely, we recognize and appreciate the positive achievements of science and technology in improving the conditions of life, but they have not come without cost or risks. As an activist scholar and ethical philosopher, I cannot help noticing the toll digital technology is taking on our commitment to critical thinking, creativity, cooperative problem-solving, emotional discipline, communication, collaboration, and relational development and exchange. I note also the progressive loss of place and meaning in the workplace by workers not timely or priority trained to be a part of this momentous transition. Likewise, there is inadequate discussion and development of ways to make technology, in all its stages, a collaborative process and shared good and clearly directed toward human good and the well-being of the world.

To speak rightly is to recognize and respond effectively to the fact that we are a people in resistance. Here I define resistance as both opposition and affirmation, opposition to all forms of injustice, inequality and oppression and an affirmation of our Africanness, our unique and equally valid and valuable way of being human in the world. I refer to our special role in this country as a moral and social vanguard, as a model and mirror of a people profoundly and irreversibly dedicated to liberation and a new history and hope for humankind. And our resistance is rooted in values that are dignity-affirming,

life-enhancing and world-preserving in the tradition of our honored ancestors.

The touted so-called miracles of technology have not been equally distributed and their impact is unequally harmful to us and others different and vulnerable. The practitioners come to the technological project fully clothed in their own culture and their technological developments both express and affirm the views, values and practices of that culture. Therefore, technology has generated sites and sources of both oppression and resistance. These sites of oppression and resistance include: definitional dominance, control of the very definition of the real, the right and the relevant; identity formation, which is narrow, consumerist and vulgarly individualistic; information distortion, in accuracy and manipulation; the problematization of quality relations, of maintaining a strong and sense humanity in terms of ourselves and others; dependency construction - erosion of the concept and practice of agency; underdeveloped intellect and deep thinking; and the progressive loss or diminishing of central sites of reaffirmation and learning, i.e., from schools and libraries to community groups and gatherings.

Here we must challenge the very logic and language of technology, its use of tools concepts, categories, classification and approaches which discriminate, demean, exclude and penalize the different and vulnerable and degenerates into little more than algorithmic racism. We must participate meaningfully in policy-making, determining the principle, purpose and performance of AI in terms of its research, design, development and deployment. And we must become active self-conscious agents of critical change along

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with an expanded community of activists, technicians, researchers, journalists, business owners, consumers and politicians to change policies and practices. Finally, we must reestablish a balance between the hard sciences and the humanities, keeping in mind the need to direct technology and science toward views, values and practices that are

dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and world-preserving in the face of the pervasive and powerful push for profit, efficiency and control. And again and always, we ground our practice and struggle for these shared human goods in the best of our culture, ethical insights, social achievements, and the urgencies of our times.

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