# Resisting data colonialism: What lies ahead

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Given what we have learned about how data colonialism works, there is no reason we have to accept the *status quo*. We need, collectively and individually, to be disobedient and work towards a different, more just world.

The peoples of the majority of the world have always developed strategies and created spaces of resistance in spite of the will of extermination and dispossession of the systems of violence. These strategies of resistance can be considered as epistemic disobedience:[[1]](#footnote-1) a resistance that struggles to break away from the coloniality of power, which is exercised through the coloniality of knowledge, being and feeling.[[2]](#footnote-2) The value of resistance lies in the possibility of producing fissures in the systems of violence that make existence possible. The native peoples of the world and many other groups around the globe in search of autonomy, dignity and their right to the future, have traced a trajectory of practices that have not succumbed to the annihilating logic of the capitalist/colonial/patriarchal model of the world.

This discussion raises important questions for thinking about what potential alternatives or modes of resistance we can develop. That is, if these values and ways of operation of data colonialism do not do us much good, how can we go against them? In what way do subjects *resist* the coloniality of power that materializes through datafication, algorithmic mediation and automation? What does resistance mean in conditions of extreme inequality, in contexts where the worst expressions of capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy are manifested?What are the consequences of the colonial mode in which data operates in our life today?

Indeed, we have to ask: *Why* resist? What is the *meaning* of resistance? The social order constructed through datafication is rooted in historical and emergent forms of violence. Data extraction as a form of dispossession generates economic, racial, gender, epistemic, environmental, and other forms of injustice. There’s little care for the social consequences of data systems, or the social worlds that they directly impact. Our freedom, autonomy, other ways of knowing, and our democracies are eroded. Realizing this is a departing-point for action.

## What is the meaning of resistance?

Resistance is a way of remaking the world. In this way, resisting is re-existing. Albán refers to resistance as practices through which communities recreate their material and symbolic worlds, and from there confront inequalities, marginalization, discrimination and racialization. Re-existence, then, is understood as ‘the redefinition and resignification of life in conditions of dignity’.[[3]](#footnote-3) To resist is to re-exist, to explore alternatives for a dignified life and to delink ourselves from that which subtracts humanity from us. Datafication, if instituted as a dominant rationality governed by the market, becomes a process that reduces us, quantifies our lives, redefines social orders of classification and creates new knowledge orders. It also reinforces social asymmetries. Datafication takes away our autonomy and our capacity to make decisions, prefigurating our future. For this reason, resisting in the context of datafied societies implies recovering autonomy, sovereignty, communality, conviviality, but above all, recovering our right to the future, and our forms of collective agency despite actors who seek to appropriate our ways of sustaining life.

## How to resist?

Decoloniality as a political praxis, is a roadmap to imagine various actions against data colonialism. Coloniality is multidimensional and we need to understand it in order to imagine ways to resist data colonialism. The repertoires of resistance might take the form of material and immaterial alternatives that take into account the plurality of forms of being, knowing, feeling, doing, and living in the world. An act of resistance entails imagining tactics for disengagement on various spheres of life in which oppressive datafication systems are embedded: our social interactions, epistemic frameworks, bodies, and territories. Thus, we can undertake legal, pedagogical, organizational, communicative, technical, infrastructural, and creative actions of resistance that allow the construction of a common sense of struggle.

We can speak of forms of resistance to socio-technical violence on multiple levels: on the one hand, resistance to the processes of datafication, algorithmization and automation. On the other, resistance on the continuum from the macro to the micro-political levels. Finally, agency and resistance take place at various domains from the material to the immaterial: infrastructures, practices, imaginaries or even the unconscious.[[4]](#footnote-4) Decolonial praxis takes different forms.

## What can I do? How can I get involved? How could things be different?

Some people think that resisting datafication means passing legislation or making technical adjustments. What we propose here is that resistance does not mean that we can resist data coloniality only by changing the technology behind it. We must also change the relationships that govern the social and economic systems that support it.  This book offers some practical take-away resources for starting to do just this!

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1. Walter Mignolo, ‘Epistemic disobedience, independent thought and decolonial freedom’, Theory, culture & society 26.7 and 26.8 (2009): 159–181. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Quijano, ‘Coloniality and modernity/rationality’ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Adolfo A. Albán, ‘¿Interculturalidad sin decolonialidad?: colonialidades circulantes y prácticas de re-existencia’ in Wilmer Villa and Arturo Grueso Bonilla (comps), Diversidad, interculturalidad y construcción de ciudad, Bogotá: Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá y Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, 2008 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Suely Rolnik, Esferas de la insurrección. Apuntes para descolonizar el inconsciente, Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)