

Teaching AI, Power and Inequality

A teaching and adoption guide to *The Inequality Regime of AI: Power, Allocation, and the Struggle for Justice*

Massimo Ragnedda & Maria Laura Ruiu

PUBLISHER Routledge	PUBLICATION June 2026	LENGTH 188 pages	ISBN 978-1-041-17368-7
------------------------	--------------------------	---------------------	---------------------------

Why teach this book?

The book offers a sociological framework for understanding AI inequality beyond questions of access, skills and model bias. It asks how predictive systems classify people, how those classifications become consequential through institutions, and how control over data, computing capacity and the “means of cognition” reorganizes power. Across labor, welfare, education, environmental extraction and global asymmetries, the book connects micro-level experience with institutional and geopolitical structures. It also moves beyond critique by examining critical AI literacy, algorithmic commons and redistributive infrastructures.

Suitable for

Digital sociology	Media & communication	Science & technology studies	AI ethics
Digital inequality	Political sociology	Technology policy	Environmental sociology

Learning outcomes

- Distinguish inequalities of access and participation from inequalities of prediction and allocation.
- Analyse AI as a sociotechnical and institutional system rather than only as a technical model.
- Identify how data, classifications, infrastructures and institutional decisions can reproduce or reorganize inequality.
- Evaluate alternative governance arrangements, including contestability, critical AI literacy, algorithmic commons and redistributive infrastructures.

Key concepts and where to find them

Concept	Teaching focus	Chapters
AI inequality regime	From participation gaps to prediction, classification and allocation	1–3
Allocative turn	How AI classifications become consequential through institutions	2, 5–6
Algorithmic habitus	How automated environments shape dispositions, conduct and self-understanding	4
Techno-colonialism & computational metabolism	Global labour, data extraction and environmental inequalities	7–8
Digital feudalism & algorithmic commons	Concentration, dependency and alternative infrastructures	9–11

A ready-to-use seminar

From the Digital Divide to the AI Inequality Regime

FORMAT	CORE READING	LEVEL
90-minute seminar	Chapters 1–2	Advanced UG / PG

Suggested seminar flow

Time	Stage	What students do
10 min	Opening prompt	Who benefits when an AI system predicts correctly, and who bears the cost when it is wrong?
20 min	Conceptual bridge	Move from first-, second- and third-level digital divides to the allocative turn: access and skills matter, but so does who controls classification and prediction.
25 min	Case analysis	Students examine one consequential domain such as hiring, welfare, education, health, credit or policing.
20 min	Power mapping	Identify data sources, prediction targets, institutional decision-makers, beneficiaries, burdens and routes of contestation.
15 min	Discussion	Can an algorithm be statistically fair while the institution using it remains unequal?

Discussion questions

1. How does AI inequality differ from the traditional digital divide?
2. Who possesses the power to classify, predict and define the categories on which prediction depends?
3. At what point does prediction become allocation of opportunities, resources, risks or scrutiny?
4. Can an algorithm be fair while the institution in which it operates systematically produces unequal outcomes?
5. What forms of governance would make predictive power more contestable and democratically accountable?

Class exercise: map an AI allocation system

In small groups, choose one domain: *employment, welfare, education, health, credit, migration, policing or public services*.

1. DATA What data are collected, and whose histories do they represent?	2. PREDICTION What is being predicted, scored or classified?	3. CONTROL Who owns or controls the data, model and computing infrastructure?
4. ALLOCATION What decision follows, and who gains or loses?	5. FEEDBACK How might the decision generate new data for future predictions?	6. CONTESTATION Who can challenge, correct or refuse the outcome?

Ways to adopt the book

- Single-session reading: Chapters 1–2 for a seminar on AI inequality and the allocative turn.
- Two-week module: Chapters 2, 5 and 6 on digital inequality, institutions and structural/algorithmic violence.
- Global AI justice module: Chapters 7–9 on environmental inequality, techno-colonialism and digital feudalism.
- Postgraduate theory or dissertation reading list: use the full book as a framework for analysing AI, power and inequality.

BOOK & TEACHING RESOURCES

The Inequality Regime of AI: Power, Allocation, and the Struggle for Justice

DOI: 10.4324/9781003689379 · [Book website](#) · [Routledge](#)

Authors: Massimo Ragnedda (University of Sharjah) · Maria Laura Ruiu (American University of Sharjah)