



## Artificial Intelligence Versus Emotional Intelligence: The Feminist Perspective in the Nigerian Novel

**\*Egbung, I.**

Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar

**\*Corresponding author email:** itangede@yahoo.com

### Abstract

This paper interrogates the intersection between Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Emotional Intelligence (EI) from the feminist perspective in the Nigerian novel. The paper notes that while AI is the ability of machines to perform certain functions like humans, EI is the ability to recognize and understand emotions in oneself and others in order to make informed decisions that will be beneficial to everyone. Using Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, this paper adopts the qualitative research methodology to explore the comparative analysis between the two concepts as it affects human relationships. Adopting the humanist feminist theory that emphasizes the importance of empathy, compassion and emotional intelligence in promoting human well-being and understanding, the paper deconstructs AI as it concerns gender studies because it perpetuates and amplifies existing social bias against women. The paper concludes that AI is just an artificial elongation and perpetuation of the subjugation of the female gender because the negative stereotypes against women are still sustained. This is exhibited through Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Eugene in *Purple Hibiscus* (2006) who are the promoters of Artificial Intelligence. While Emotional Intelligence is portrayed by Ogbuefi Ezeudu in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Fr. Amadi in *Purple Hibiscus* (2006).

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence, Emotional Intelligence, Feminism, Perspective, Nigerian Novel

### Introduction

The introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the contemporary world is an invention of a new device and technology that is intended to complement human actions and activities. This is because it has been hyped to be more intelligent than humans. But Mba notes that "One significant thing to note is that AI is not a replacement of human intelligence. It is rather dependent on human intelligence to function because it is powered by human beings" (547). One of the founders of AI, John McCarthy is a man who is very much aware and familiar with gender biases in the society. Therefore, he animated AI to uphold those biases. Feminists frown at the amplification of gender biases by AI, that is why, from the feminist perspective, it views AI with a concern due to its potential to amplify existing gender biases and inequalities emphasizing the need to actively design and develop AI systems that are inclusive, equitable and address power imbalances by considering the experiences and perspectives of marginalized groups, particularly women, when creating algorithms and data sets; essentially arguing that AI should be developed with a focus on social justice and not to perpetuate social stereotypes. Therefore, Alison Adam has come up with what she calls "Feminist Artificial Intelligence". This is an attempt to write back feminist history with Artificial Intelligence. Toupin (2023) notes that Alison Adam is a British Computer Scientist and historian of science who criticized AI from a feminist perspective, showing it had deeply conservative foundations. Russell and Norvig (2020) posit that:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the simulation of human intelligence in machines that are programmed to think, learn, and solve problems like humans. These systems are capable of performing tasks that typically require human cognition, such as understanding language, recognizing patterns, making decisions and adapting to new information.

Feminists agree with Emotional Intelligence (EI) because it exudes logical reasoning and altruism. They wonder why it is viewed as a feminine trait because it has to do with empathy, intuition and emotions, which are sometimes dismissed as "weakness" in societal norms. Feminists argue that this perception needs to be challenged, adding that (EI) should be recognized as a valuable asset for everyone, regardless of gender. Artificial intelligence is the ability of machines to learn, reason and act like humans, but the machines lack the ability to apply emotional

intelligence at some critical situations when the need arises. There has been calls for gender equity and equality from so many quarters because of the roles women play in the society. Women have been discriminated against because of their gender and patriarchal stereotypes over time in the society. Through their personal efforts, they have struggled to pull themselves out of the negative portrayals both in the society and in the literary creation. Artificial intelligence mirrors the biases that are present in our society. Therefore, to balance the narrative, Feminist Artificial Intelligence (FAI) should be applied. Avila (2021) argues that FAI

reframe[s] the discourse around AI, and brings closer to the hands and minds of women and girls[...]. Feminists will not just translate today into the design, they will translate utopia and code gender and race equality into the design (qtd in Toupin, 2023).

One would assume that with the advent of artificial intelligence, the image created about women in the society would be different, but this research observes that in generative artificial intelligence, the negative portrayal of women is what is reflected in artificial intelligence. In that vein, West has called for a remediation. She argues that

Remediation is understood as the work of making things right, of stopping and reversing the damage done by harmful AI systems. Fairness, she believes, distracts from the more difficult work of grappling with the systemic and structural dimensions of discrimination (qtd in Toupin, 2023)

### The concept of feminism

Feminism is an ideology that has gained currency in research. It is an ideology that encourages self-assertiveness for both men and women. There are several definitions of feminism, this research will adopt those ones that are relevant to the tenets of this paper. There are men who are not feminists but they share the views of feminists, they do this by supporting the ideological cause. Banks (1986) recognizes the fact that from the beginning a number of men have supported feminism and their supports have contributed to the progress of 'first-wave feminism' (106). She identifies them to include John Stuart Mill, William Shaen and James Stansfeld. In African literature, we have Ousmane, Ngugi and later Achebe.

Moi (1989) argues that "feminism, then, is something more than the effort to express women's experience: it is at once a relatively comprehensive analysis of power relations between the sexes, and the effort to change or undo any power system that authorizes and condones male power over women" (183). She goes further to argue that men can be feminist even though they are not women. Just as whites can be anti-racists even though they are not blacks. She notes further that though men can be feminists, they cannot be feminist in the same way as women, because males and females do not and cannot take up the same position in relation to female experience. Ikideh (1998) argues that African male writers are feminists in their own way because they give women prominent roles in their works. He states that:

Among African writers, it is in Ngugi and Ousmane more than in any others that one finds a galaxy of consistently well developed women characters who stand shoulder to shoulder with the male characters, sometimes outshining them, not in their empty verbal claims or other female varieties, but essentially in the quality of their persons as women and in their contributions to the community. No woman writer in Africa that I know has done it quite so beautifully and so unsentimentally. (52)

Okoye (2000) advocates a shade of feminism and calls it personism. She argues that a personist is one who fights discrimination against any person either man or woman but believes in the equality of persons and fights against the subordination of persons. (360). Njoku (1994) notes that a feminist is "an individual who is not only concerned with her survival and autonomy, but she is also committed to the welfare of her people, both men and women" (198). Davies (1986) summarizes the concept of what African feminism represents. Firstly, it recognizes a common struggle with African men for the removal of yokes of foreign domination and European/American exploitation, African feminism is not antagonistic to African men but it challenges them to be aware of certain salient aspects of women's subjugation which differ from the generalized oppression of all African peoples. She goes further to argue that African feminism recognizes that women in pre-colonial period were active participants in their societies (9-10). Based on these points, this paper is justified to apply feminist ideology in the analysis of Achebe's *Things fall apart* because it has to do with both men and women. This goes further to show that if Feminist Artificial Intelligence (FAI) is applied in literature, there will be a balanced discourse. Toupin (2023) notes that

The promise associated with FAI is that a fairer, slower, consensual collaborative AI is possible. The belief that if FAI was the default model, the types of technologies we build, and experience would be very different than the ones we have now. Outside such utopian imaginary, FAI represents a tactical intervention and can be considered as a form of resistance to large-scale hegemonic and discriminatory AI. (592)

## Methodology

This paper adopts the qualitative research method as it engages in the textual analysis of the primary texts: *Things fall apart* by Chinua Achebe and *Purple hibiscus* by Chimamanda Adichie. The research also employs other critical sources from the library and internet. What informs the choice of the texts is the thematic import of the two texts as they explore how characters in the texts exhibit both intelligences: artificial and emotional, and the resultant effect of the choices made by the characters.

### Artificial intelligence versus emotional intelligence in Chinua Achebe's *Things fall apart*

In Chinua Achebe's *Things fall apart*, lack of the application of (EI) leads to the downfall of the central character Okonkwo. If Okonkwo had applied (EI), he would not have killed Ikemefuna, a boy who lives with him and calls him father. Despite the fact that Okonkwo was advised by Ogbuefi Ezeudu, the oldest man in Umuofia community, not to have a hand in the boy's death, Okonkwo chooses to exhibit his masculinity because of his position in the community. Azodo (2004) notes that

Power show, to avoid emotion of fear or lack of self-esteem, might appear incomprehensible to the observer. Actions, to avoid being seen as weak or ineffective, could also appear illogical to the Other, though rational and logical to the subject. (51)

In the context of this paper, (AI) is a concept that upholds societal norms whether negative or positive, detrimental or beneficial to mankind. And norms are patriarchal practices that tend to undermine the feelings of the female gender. AI as a technology has been ascribed the role of the male gender. Wacjman (1991) argues that technology was recognized as masculine culture as a result of the historical and cultural construction of gender. Therefore, (EI) as advised by Ezeudu would have led to the betterment of Okonkwo and his household, but he chooses (AI) which becomes detrimental to his existence and that of his household. The admonition from Ezeudu is what Azodo calls "structural power". His position in the community bestows him the authority to foresee the future. Azodo (2004) notes that

It was on that authority and power that he advised Okonkwo, out of sight and earshot of all and sundry, not to be involved in the murder of the unfortunate youth, Ikemefuna, billed to be sacrificed to the Earth goddess, Ani, as atonement for the murder of a daughter of a contiguous clan. (53)

Emotional intelligence (EI) guides and directs an individual on any course of action that will lead to the betterment of all concerned. This paper argues that Okonkwo neglected (EI) and rather applied (AI) because of the impression people have and would have about him for his action or inaction. He has achieved fame and wealth and he is considered as a great man in Umuofia community because of the exploits he has made such as defeating Amalinze the Cat in a wrestling bout; a great farmer with plenty yam barns even when his lazy father Unoka did not bequeath him any yam seedlings; a husband of three wives with many children who rules his household with an iron fist and a title holder. Therefore, in his reasoning, heeding to the advice of Mazi Ezeudu would have portrayed him as a weak man.

Okonkwo also disregards Emotional Intelligence in his dealings with his family and applies Artificial Intelligence. He beats his wife in the Week of Peace as stipulated by the Umuofia community. This is because he wants to display his authority as the man of the house; and to place the woman where she belongs: the kitchen as well as to be controlled by the man. Emotional Intelligence creates room for empathy, emotions and forgiveness, but Artificial Intelligence does not, that is why Okonkwo did not see the need to forgive the wife who erred even in the Week of Peace, hence the need for the application of FAI. Adam (1995) argues that the way forward may be found not only in feminist projects involving traditional AI technology but also in further AI research informed by feminist and other writing on the role of the body in knowledge production.

Of course, there are consequences that follow when one refuses to apply (EI) in place of (AI). This is because the voice of (EI) is that of morality and sound judgement. Okonkwo is a typical example. Azodo (2004) notes that

And Okonkwo paid dearly for his transgression with his exile and dispossession by the community. Okonkwo's fate took a downward turn from this point on in the plot of the novel. He goes from isolation and exile to suicide and interment in the evil forest reserved only for the dregs and other never-do-wells of the village community. (54)

### Artificial intelligence versus emotional intelligence in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple hibiscus*

The application of emotional intelligence in *Purple Hibiscus* guided Fr. Amadi, a Reverend father to bring out the hidden potentials in Kambili which her father, Eugene Achike could not. He makes her have confidence in herself for the first time and to realize her womanhood. In her father's house in Enugu, Kambili has been like a robot, not having a mind of her own. That gives rise to her and her brother Jaja always asking themselves questions that they already know the answers, because their speech was stifled. The narrator tells us that: "We did that often, asking each other questions whose answers we already knew. Perhaps it was so that we would not ask the other questions, the ones whose answers we did not want to know" (23). They were silenced

and voiceless, it is in Nsukka that they achieve and realize their humanities. Their stifled life in Enugu makes Kambili and Jaja to behave abnormally. That is why Amaka comments that they are weird. "Are you sure they're not abnormal, mom? Kambili just behaved like an *atulu* when my friends came....She behaves funny. Even Jaja is strange. Something is not right with them" (141). This worries Kambili who asks Jaja in their quiet moment "Do you think we're abnormal" (150). But all these changed when Fr. Amadi came into the scene and applied emotional intelligence (EI). He discovers Kambili's hidden talents as a sprinter. He takes her to the stadium even without her initial consent. "We're are going to the stadium for football. You can play or watch" (171). Through emotional intelligence (EI), Fr. Amadi is able to identify the hidden potentials in the teenager. He brings himself to her level regardless of the fact that he is a priest. Kambili considers her closeness to the priest as an opportunity to confess her sins, that is why she quickly said: "I sleep in the same room as my grandfather. He is a heathen" (173). This confession is based on the orientation Eugene her father has given to her and Jaja. And this is not true, and Fr. Amadi questions her to know who gave her that orientation, even though he already knows, because Jaja had informed him. This orientation from Eugene is artificially generated. Mba has argued that

The data being generated by AI may not always be accurate. It is being fed by humans and trained and the product of such training could be incorrect. The implication is the generation of inaccurate information after the asking procedure by the user of AI. If all data is used without being scrutinized by the user, the knowledge being gain becomes false. (547)

In the context of the paper, the knowledge being generated from Eugene who represents artificial intelligence about his father to his children is false, and it has to be corrected. That is what Fr. Amadi who is an embodiment of emotional intelligence attempts to do.

On the other hand, artificial intelligence as exhibited by Eugene makes him a terror to his children and wife. He has already identified himself in the society as a strict man. Particularly in his community Abba where everybody worships him because of his wealth, except his father. In order to maintain his position, he stifles his family members and makes them to be at his whims and caprices. The narrator tells us that "Papa's title was *omelora*, after all, The One Who Does for the Community" (56). His wealth was so much that he could afford to feed the whole village during Christmas, yet his father lives in abject poverty. We get insights into his wealth through the narrator who tells us that Eugene feeds the whole village during the Christmas season to the satisfaction of everyone (56). During their Christmas holiday in the village, on Sunday while preparing for Mass, Kambili who woke up and observed that her monthly menstrual period had started was having cramps. She was in pains, but she was also expected to go to church by the father, Beatrice and Jaja applied emotional intelligence (EI), which is intended to ameliorate the pains Kambili was going through by preparing cornflakes for her to eat, so that she can take Panadol and be fit to attend Mass. This action did not go down well with Eugene because of his artificial intelligence (AI) which stipulates that the doctrine of the church must be observed even in critical situations. He views that as an abomination and unleashed terror on his household.

Has the devil built a tent in my house? He turned to Mama. You sit there and watch her desecrate the Eucharist fast, *maka nnidi?*" He unbuckled his belt slowly. It was a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather with a sedate leather-vered buckle. It landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder. Then Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm, which was covered by the puffy sequined sleeve of her church blouse. I put the bowl down just as the belt landed on my back....Papa was like a Fulani nomad although he did not have their spare, tall body as he swung his belt at Mama, Jaja and me, muttering that the devil would not win. We did not move more than two steps away from the leather belt that swished through the air. (103)

The observances and doctrine of the church is more important to Eugene no matter the situation. Therefore, violating them attracts severe consequences and punishments. He beats up his wife and children to justify his position as one who upholds the doctrines of the Catholic church.

There is a very close relationship between Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Eugene in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. While Okonkwo upholds the traditional religion of his people against all odds, Eugene upholds and promotes Catholicism strongly no matter whose ox is gored. Both of them fail to apply emotional intelligence in matters that require it, rather, they choose to uphold artificial intelligence which perpetuates the norm that has been created and which must be obeyed.

## Conclusion

This paper has attempted to do a comparative analysis of the difference between artificial intelligence and emotional intelligence. It has shown that artificial intelligence upholds the norms of the society whether they benefit humans or not. On the other hand, emotional intelligence weighs the situation on ground and applies sound judgement that will benefit all those concerned. Feminists are skeptical about artificial intelligence because it perpetuates gender biases against women. This paper states that in as much as artificial intelligence has come to stay in our contemporary reality, it should be animated in such a way that it corrects negative biases and stereotypes that are formed against particular sets of people. FAI are of the opinion that AI design should take

into consideration greater or increased participation of women, queer, trans, and non-binary designers from all backgrounds, origins and geographers (Meinders, 2017, 2020). This will create more insights on some knowledge that are yet to be utilized in AI. Toupin (2023) notes that

shedding light on undervalued knowledge production within AI is a feminist move that allows scholars, readers and practitioners to have access to alternative narratives and to enrich the history and contemporary practices of critical AI research and practice. (582)

The paper therefore concludes that, for artificial intelligence to be devoid of patriarchal biases and stereotypes, feminist artificial intelligence (FAI) should be incorporated into the animation. This will create a balance, because, just as machines (technology) has a bond with masculinity, “it was an ideological position, the ideology of masculinity which created a bond between men and machines” (Wacjman, 1991). This paper argues that since artificial intelligence (AI) is synonymous with masculinity, feminist artificial intelligence (FAI) is synonymous with emotional intelligence.

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