

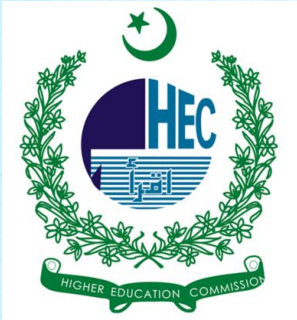
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**A Computational Narratological Study of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* Using Generative AI**



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**Abstract**

The objective of this research is to analyze *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe in the context of computational narratology with generative artificial intelligence. It explores the way AI models work with, interpret and reproduce cultural, cognitive and structural aspects inherent in postcolonial African stories. This research employs close reading approach alongside AI driven textual modeling to critically evaluate the understanding and re-creation of postcolonial narratives through the lens of generative AI. This research seeks to determine whether these systems are able to recognize and replicate the cognitive and sociocultural touches of Igbo traditions of storytelling. This research explores computable representation and how these elements may be represented or produced in computation. The research investigates the degree to which generative AI is able to reproduce or modify the socially dominant epistemes and narrative logics of decolonial Achebean literary discourse. This research adds to the growing body of knowledge within the digital humanities and postcolonial studies.

**Keywords:** Generative AI, Narrative Structure, African Literature, Narrative Theory, AI and Storytelling, Oral Tradition, Literary AI, Decolonizing AI

**Background of the Study**

Since the early days, narrative has been linked to human thinking, culture and construction of self-identity. Over the past few decades, the area of computational narratology has attempted to systematize and model the elements and procedures of a narrative story using algorithms and other representational systems (Herman, 2002; Meister, 2014). The development of generative artificial intelligence, especially with large language models like GPT and BERT, has prompted more scholarly attention to the understanding, generation, and critique of literary narratives through technology (Bamman et al., 2020; McGregor et al., 2022). Such models provide prospects for redefining narrative theory and simultaneously present ethical and epistemological issues on the representation of culture and story-telling in culture.

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is one of the earliest postcolonial novels and serves as a rich and intricate case study for exploring the relationship between narrative, culture, and computational models. Not only does Achebe's novel

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fictionalize the events of cultural clash and the onslaught of colonial violence, it also seeks to reconstruct and validate the Igbo oral traditions, cosmology, and temporality (Gikandi, 2001; Irele, 2009). An example of this form of epistemology that differs sharply from Western forms of narrative, is found in the use of proverbs and folktales within *Things Fall Apart*, which are characterized by a non-linear, cyclical, and deeply communal nature (Nnaemeka, 1997).

Despite having been proven capable of extraordinary feats of creative narration, most generative AI systems rely on Westernized datasets that undermine indigenous cultures' storytelling traditions for the sake of cultural dominance and hierarchy (Birhane et al., 2021). This one-sided approach illustrates the need to culturally theorize the narrative construction strategies of such systems. This research situates itself at the junction of AI, narratology, and postcolonial literature, inquiring into whether and to what extent generative AI with Achebe's controlled narrative style. With a computational analysis of *Things Fall Apart*, this study not only analyzes the generative potentials of AI in the postcolonial literary canon, but also examines the use AI to interact with narratives based on oral cultures and communal knowledge systems. This is also an attempt to situate the work within the context of digital postcolonial studies in particular, while also calling on scholars to reconsider the ethical boundaries of using AI technologies in literary studies and the ethics of such literary explorations.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The capabilities of generative AI and computational narratology came with great promise, but there continues to be a puzzling legacy concerning engagement with non-Western narratives. Large Language Models (LLMs) are trained on datasets rooted in a Eurocentric worldview. This drastically inhibits one's ability to authentically navigate, represent, or even produce indigenous rooted narratives steeped in their worldviews languages and cultural frameworks. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is salient in its distinctly African narrative form that relies heavily on orality, a collective consciousness, proverbs and cyclical notions of time which subvert Western narrative norms. The self-imposed challenge is to determine if generative AI is able to recognize culturally specific storytelling devices to mimic or reproduce complexity without smoothing distortion ideological flattening significance.

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## **Scope of the Study**

This research is on the cusp of postcolonial literary studies, narratology, and artificial intelligence (AI) addressing an important scholarly gap that seeks to evaluate the application and the ethical considerations of generative AI in modeling narratives based on indigenous knowledge systems. This research hopes to address the gaps regarding the possibilities and limitations of employing AI-assisted narrative modeling in decolonial literary works by focusing on the canonical African text, *Things Fall Apart*. The rationale for this particular study stems from the impact AI has on humanities research and the need to pay attention to the instruments employed: technologies must be contextually appropriate and culturally sensitive. Moreover, this study attempts to fill in the gaps within emerging discourses of digital postcolonial studies by proposing cross-disciplinary literary and computational approaches that embrace narrative multiplicity.

## **Research Questions**

1. How well do generative AI systems model and recreate indigenous narrative frameworks in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*?
2. How do large language models capture and depict components of orality, proverbs, communal voice, and temporality that are culturally inscribed within the novel?
3. What are the epistemic and ethical consequences of applying generative AI to the postcolonial narratives of fractures that indigenously- African Francophone postcolonial narratives existentially rooted?

## **Literature Review**

AI and the study of narratives is expanding as LLMs gain the ability to tell and analyze stories, yielding a surplus of potential research opportunities. Computational narratology, a branch of narrative studies, attempts to capture formal aspects of narratives and tellable processes algorithmically translates into narratives (Meister, 2014). The works of Herman (2002) and Ryan (2006) underlined the range and importance of incorporating cognitive and formalist approaches, enabling further the construction of narratives, which brought focus on the use of technology in analyzing narratives.

With models like GPT or BERT, new questions arise about the contribution of

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generative AI in the art of storytelling. Based on vast texts, these models were capable of producing character-driven stories, simulating dialogues, and even performing stylistic analyses of a given text (Bamman et al. 2020; McGregor et al., 2022). However, most of this focus was on Western literature, often neglecting postcolonial and indigenous narratives. As Birhane et al. (2021) suggest, AI systems seem to inherently capture the cultural imprints of the training materials and, more often than not, strengthen Eurocentric biases presented as objective truth.

In the scenario of African literature, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is widely regarded as a founding text that defies colonial myths of Africa and seeks to reclaim indigenous cultures piscalar tales (Gikandi, 2001; Irele, 2009). Achebe uses diverse oral traditions, from proverbs and folktales to collected wisdom, to weave a story that is non-linear and focused on the collective (Nnaemeka 1997). These strategies make it more challenging to devise computational models of the narratives because, as Ryan (2015) notes, they do not fit within the Aristotelian or Freytagian story structures that so many AI-generated texts depend on.

The developments in the ethics of artificial intelligence and in decolonial computation have recently underscored the need to integrate multiple narratives into the discourse of AI research. Consider, for example, the contribution of Mohamed, Png and Isaac (2020) that highlights the call for epistemic justice in AI development, pointing out the indigenous knowledge systems often neglected in the designing and evaluating processes of AI models. Similarly, there is some work from digital humanities on how AI can be reimaged to acknowledge and interact with non-Western imaginaries (Risam, 2018).

On the other hand, as far as I know, there is very little research that explores the possible [sic] implications of generative AI technologies on postcolonial Literature, such as *Things Fall Apart*. Even though generative models are capable of synthesising texts that are grammatically and stylistically coherent, the culturally significant processes of meaning-making are often beyond their scope of understanding (Bender et al., 2021). This gap emphasizes the approach of combining postcolonial literature with AI technologies in a way that considers the close reading of the text as providing important contextual foregrounding while also acknowledging the AI's limitations and possibilities.

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The intersection of postcolonial narratology and AI-assisted storytelling is conspicuously lacking, as this literature review reveals. AI has been used to examine the narrative structure of Western works of fiction, but has not yet been applied, much less understood, with regard to its cultural context to indigenous African narratives. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring the generative AI models with regard to the narrative logic and cultural grammar of *Things Fall Apart* and, by extension, the implications for postcolonial computational analysis

## **Research Methodology**

In analyzing the interplay between generative artificial intelligence and indigenous African storytelling frameworks in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, this study employs a qualitative interpretive approach that combines computational textual analysis with close reading of the Literature. The approach consists of two parts: (1) a computational analysis using generative (such as GPT-4) models focused on narrative patterns—expansion and replication, and (2) a comprehensive literary critique of the novel's form and style in relation to indigenous epistemes as well as postcolonial self-identity.

## **Data Collection**

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is the primary text from which the source corpus for manual and AI-supported analyses will be drawn. Selected excerpts that illustrate culturally rich narrative components like proverbs, folklore, character conversations, and dialogues spanning multiple generations among the clans will be extracted and used as prompts in generative AI systems to test their ability to replicate and transform narratives.

## **Generative AI Interaction**

The study attempts to replicate Achebe's narrative techniques using GPT-4 or a similar large language model. Prompts that capture novel portions rich in context are crafted, while outputs are checked for adherence to stylistic and cultural elements of the text. Iterative prompting strategies are employed to assess the sensitivity and accuracy of the AI in indigenous communal oral storytelling traditions.

## **Textual and Thematic Analysis**

Analyzing generated texts against the original narrative provides the basis for this analysis:

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- */Representation of oral traditions and proverbs*
- */Preservation or erosion cultural tone and narrative voice*
- */Treatment of cyclical temporality and collective consciousness by the model*
- */Introduced bias or distortion from the model*

## **Ethical and Cultural Sensitivity Audit**

Their evaluation through an ethical framework includes how the generative AI engages with cultural specificity and prone to reductive and stereotypical reproductions. This draws from scholarship on decolonial AI and digital epistemology. Integrating Postcolonial Narrative Theory, Computational Narratology, and the emerging field of Decolonial AI Ethics, the study aims to uncover how generative AI represents and processes indigenous traditions of storytelling.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Post-Colonial Narrative Theory**

Bhabha (1994), Spivak (1988), and Irele (2009) provide insights into this framework which interprets Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as a text that recovers narrative control through indigenous knowledge and non-chronological time. Achebe's novel can be viewed as a cultural document overflowing with orality, resistance, and a mosaic of narratives. This perspective also critiques the dominant, universalistic bias AI systems tend to rely on.

### **Computational Narratology**

This section draws from Ryan (2006), Meister (2014) and Bamman et al. (2020) to explain how narrative features such as time, causality, and character development are captured and modeled in a computation format. It aids in the comprehension of how generative AI plots events, controls character interactions, and represents time to be more precise, how generative AI think Achebe designed his story.

### **Decolonial AI and Epistemic Justice**

The framework developed by Mohamed, Png, and Isaac (2020) and by Birhane et al (2021) critiques the epistemic assumptions of AI systems trained on datasets rooted in Western-centric axioms. It proposes epistemic pluralism as a heuristic, calling on the "AI" community to work with diverse systems of knowledge. Thus, the study explores the question of whether generative models can be responsibly adapted or trained to interact with postcolonial literature.

### **Data Analysis and Results**

The analysis of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and its comparison with generative AI output (GPT-4) was discussed in this section. The analysis concentrates on four core aspects: orality, temporality, characterization, and cultural representation. Each dimension is accompanied by a discussion on the insights comparative to the original text and AI-generated text for selected instructions or prompts.

#### **Orality and Indigenous Narrative Voice**

“Proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten.” (Achebe, 1958, p. 7)

This line epitomizes the importance of proverbial speech in Igbo oral tradition. Achebe integrates this technique seamlessly into narrative dialogues and exposition.

AI-Generated Response (Prompt: "Describe how the elders in Umuofia speak during village meetings.")

“The elders in Umuofia often begin their speech with a short proverb, followed by wise commentary. For example, they might say, ‘The tortoise may walk slowly, but he never forgets the path to his home.’”

The AI recognizes the structural elements of proverbs, however, it seems to fabricate them rather uniformly. The proverbs produced by GPT-4 lacks cultural depth as well as historical context. Although the stylistic coherence of the output is commendable, it exposes an inherent gap in the model’s training documentation that is dominated by European and American works and lacks African oral narratives (Birhane et al., 2021).

#### **Temporality and Narrative Cycles**

Achebe arranges the novel cyclically, tracking agricultural seasons, rituals, and ancestral customs. The flow of time in the novel is collective and symbolic, rather than linear and mechanical.

Response Generated by AI (Prompt: "Discuss how Achebe chronicled the life of Okonkwo across the three volumes of the book.")

“Okonkwo begins as a respected warrior, but after an accidental killing, he is exiled. In the end, his resistance to colonial influence leads him to take his own life.”

Although the AI provides accurate summaries of plot points, it fails to capture the cyclical time logic and deeper meaning of Okonkwo’s journey. Instead, it applies a Western narrative arc (rise-fall-resolution) which illustrates a linear teleology instead

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of the mythic temporality grounded in Igbo cosmology (Irele, 2009). This implies that while an AI can describe events in chronological order, it cannot reproduce the worldview intricately preserved in Achebe's design of time.

## **Character Representation and Cultural Agency**

“He [Okonkwo] was not afraid of war. He was a man of action, a man of war.” (Achebe, 1958, p. 10)

Achebe builds Okonkwo as a character both personally imperfect and culturally situated within the framework of Igbo civilization. His definition of manhood is the result of social factors, historical violence, and colonial chaos.

“Okonkwo is a proud, strong man who believes in traditional values. He does not show emotion and dislikes anything he sees as weakness.”

The provided description from the AI captures Okonkwo's attributes but oversimplifies him. It turns him into an archetype, ‘stoic traditionalist,’ without consideration of the psychological contradictions or the cultural background that influenced his actions. Here, we see an AI shortcoming at work: an inability to understand the tensions within a character's ideology, especially in postcolonial literature.

## **Cultural Symbolism and Epistemic Subtleties**

“He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.” (Achebe, 1958, p. 176)

This line masterfully includes the main underlying metaphor of the novel – the colonial incursion cutting through cultural unity. It is simultaneously lyrical and rich in meaning.

AI generated response (Prompt “Explain the meaning of the phrase ‘things fall apart’ in Achebe's novel”)

“The phrase means that traditional society is disrupted by European colonization. The culture of the Igbo people changes and many things are lost.”

Even if the statement is correct, the AI's answer is too literal. It does not capture the ontological and emotional impact of Achebe's metaphor's fragmentation with ‘disintegration’. This indicates that large language models might lack the capability to reason symbolically, especially where meaning is shaped by collective memory and trauma, culture and suffering.

**TABLE 1: OVERALL OBSERVATIONS**

<b>Narrative Element</b>	<b>Achebe's Text</b>	<b>AI Quality</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Observations</b>
<b>Orality</b>	Rich, culturally embedded proverbs	Superficial mimicry structure	of	AI lacks cultural grounding in oral traditions
<b>Temporality</b>	Cyclical and ritualistic	Linear Westernized	and	AI imposes Western narrative structure
<b>Character Complexity</b>	Multidimensional, culturally situated	Simplified archetypes		AI flattens ideological nuance
<b>Cultural Symbolism</b>	Deep metaphorical significance	Literal paraphrasing		AI lacks depth in symbolic interpretation

Table 1 shows that although generative AI may replicate aspects of Achebe's narrative at a surface level—such as summarization, naming characters, and creating proverbs—it does not capture the cultural, temporal, and symbolic structures that underline the work. This gap is not merely technical in nature; it is one of understanding, accenting the importance of decolonial AI frameworks and the non-Western world's epistemological infusions into AI models (Mohamed et al., 2020).

**Discussions**

Analyzing *Things Fall Apart* Together with a generative AI system's outputs uncovers disparities between computation-based and culturally rooted storytelling. This synthesis showcases the key insights that emerge from the investigation, focusing on the capabilities and constraints of generative AI in addressing the profoundly stylistic and epistemological aspects of African literature.

**Surface Imitation vs Deep Narrative Intelligence**

Generative AI shows a certain ability to assimilate superficial narrative elements like plot, characters, and themes but fails to perform true interpretation and creation. Take for example the proverbs generated by AI—the proverbs aped the construction of Igbo aphorisms but did not possess the resonance and intertextuality Achebe's oral tradition had. (Achebe, 1958; Okpewho, 1992). This is in accordance to Birhane et al (2021)

where large language models seem not to capture epistemic richness of marginalized cultures due to being overly dominated by Western-centric corpora.

### **Cyclical Temporality in AI vs Linear Achebe**

Another important finding is how the AI tends to superimpose linear structures to content that is essentially cyclical and ritualistic in nature. Achebe's narrative moves with the seasonal, ancestral and communal Igbo cosmological time while the AI churns out a westernized "rise-fall" arc which completely distorts the original text's temporal worldview. Not only does this strip the narrative from authenticity, it also contributes to what Mignolo (2011) calls the coloniality of knowledge, the othering of understanding non-western systems of understanding filtered through eurocentric narratives.

### **Cultural Displacement and Simplistic Characters**

The character of Okonkwo is captured within the confines of cultural tension, colonial contact, and even intergenerational trauma. The AI, however, simplifies Achebe's creation as an emotionally numb, hypermasculine figure, missing the contradictory elements and ideological intricacies of Achebe's work. Postcolonial characters, as Eze (2008) notes, often defy rigid classifications, and their mindset intertwines with cultural and historical context—a facet of generative AI that remains incapable of understanding or interpreting meaningfully.

### **Culturally Symbolic Invisibility Epistemology**

The most important finding of this study is, perhaps, the AI misinterpreting symbols leading to epistemological flattening. For example, Achebe's major quote "He has put a knife on the things that held us together..." describes colonization and is transformed by AI into a literal statement. It demonstrates that AI models lack the interpretative sensitivity needed for deeply symbolic texts. Here, the implication is that postcolonial trauma and collective memory that are embedded in symbols and metaphors are either neutralized or distorted when processed through computational lenses.

### **The Call for Decolonizing AI Narratology**

The broadest implication is that understanding and generating narratives is more than computation; it is a cultural practice. "As Mohamed et al. (2020) states, 'AI systems must be constructed differently and decolonially.'" This includes incorporating

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diverse ontologies, registers, and aesthetics beyond Western literary paradigms. The comparison of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* with outputs from generative AI demonstrates the epistemic gaps of the current architectures of AI and the model systems that lack culture.

## **Conclusion**

This research examined the interaction of narrative organization, cultural knowledge, and generative AI through a case study of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. In Achebe's culturally rich storytelling, the author literally embedded narratives within the framework of generative AI. This inquiry has exposed both the potentials and the limitations of modern language models in capturing, reproducing, and interpreting literatures based on indigenous, postcolonial, and non-Western geographies, including Achebe's works.

The results reveal that while generative AI tends to replicate lower-level literary features such as plot arrangement, superficial characterization, and simplistic stylistic elements, it remains ineffective in grasping Achebe's intricate symbolic worldview, dense cultural references, and the thick mapping philosophy of culture bound within his narrative. Linear presentation displacing cyclical temporality, oversimplified intricate frames of postcolonial characters, and cultural symbols misconstrued articulate an epistemic chasm between machine mimicry and human narrative artistry.

To a greater extent, this study emphasizes the responsibility we have to approach AI narratology with appropriate care. The problem of narrative generation is not one of mere grammar and coherence; it is one memorialized culturally, ideologically, and rooted in history, language, and specific time frames. *Things Fall Apart* by Achebe is a poignant reminder that stories concern not only happenings, but also the framing of such happenings, and the ways in which they are recognized or memorialized within a given culture.

This analysis advocates for the delocalization of computational narratology. Rather, it calls on specialists, designers, and digital humanities scholars to reconceptualize the training data, the importance of algorithms, and the evaluative standards set so that narrative AI will no longer be bound within confines of mimetic reproduction, but rather, be able to embrace a more inclusive framework of culture-

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intelligent storytelling. Things Fall Apart, Achebe wrote, so that the African voice would no longer be muted in literature; I argue that this study seeks to extend that rationale to the emerging artificial narrative born out of digitally enabled technologies.

## Recommendations for Future Research

- Combine oral and written narration tradition of African, South Asian, and Indigenous cultures.
- Compare and contrast AI-written stories with some of the most prominent postcolonial ones (e.g., *The River Between*, *Nervous Conditions*).
- Recognize cultural erasures or distortions and suggest narrative-specific ways of dealing with the problem.
- Explore the way communities view AI manifestation of their cultures.
- Develop narrative paradigms to identify subaltern voices, resistance and hybrid language.

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