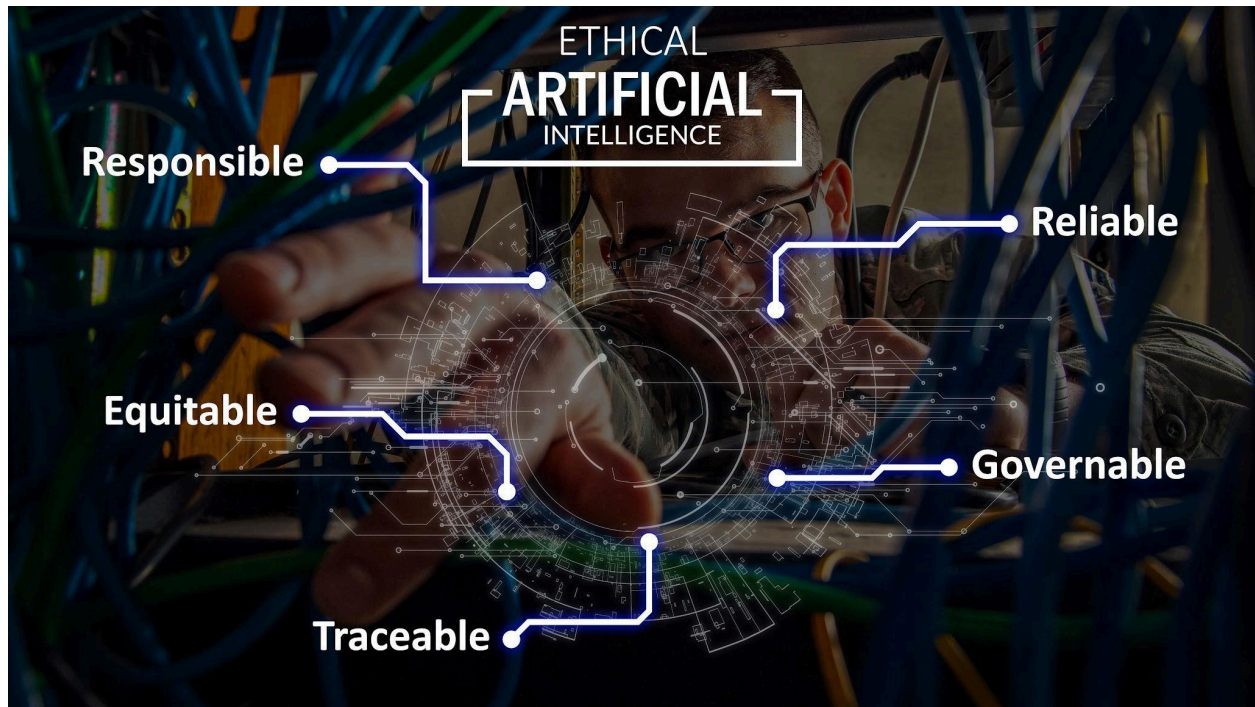**Voice, Framing, and Cultural Resonance in AI Storytelling: Fit-for-Purpose Notebook LM Studio Auditing for African Storytelling**

Date: June 11 2025

Purpose: To evaluate the narrative framing of AI-generated voices in Google's NotebookLM and identify design gaps that impact trust, credibility, and resonance, particularly in African and feminist newsrooms. The goal is to ensure that tools like NotebookLM are fit for purpose: capable of supporting high-impact, culturally grounded, and emotionally intelligent storytelling that reflects the values and expectations of the communities they serve, making uptake more seamless.

Episode Link: The Sudan Crisis

- Spotify
- Transcript

1) Executive Summary

This report examines gendered and cultural bias in the AI-generated voices featured in *The Sudan Conflict* podcast, created using Google's NotebookLM. It identifies a framing imbalance in how emotional labour and cognitive authority are distributed between a male and a female voice. Though presented as a dialogue, the male voice shapes the emotional journey and narrative transitions, while the female voice provides detailed, fact-driven analysis with little affective range.

In the episode of *The Sudan Conflict* podcast:

- The male voice speaks approximately 1,592 words
- The female voice speaks approximately 1,579 words

This means the speaking time is almost evenly split, with the man contributing just slightly more by word count (a difference of only 13 words). However, even with equal speaking time, the distribution of emotional vs cognitive labour remains imbalanced. The man takes on the role of emotional interpreter, guiding the listener's moral reactions, while the woman carries the factual and analytical burden. This reinforces narrative framing bias even in seemingly "equal" dialogue.

At first glance, this may appear to replicate a common pattern: men lead, women support. However, what makes this podcast noteworthy, and worth celebrating, is the emotional tone assigned to the male voice.

Rather than leaning into the traditional "rational male" model, the AI-generated man reacts with empathy, concern, and vulnerability. He pauses at injustice, expresses horror at atrocities, and becomes a guide not just in content, but in feeling. In many global and African media spaces where masculinity is still coded as emotionally detached or authoritative, this emotionally expressive man challenges a deep narrative bias. It introduces the possibility of softer masculinities, of men who hold space for grief, nuance, and moral clarity. This is not a flaw, it's a moment of design opportunity.

Still, the emotional flattening of the female voice is significant. She becomes a "data vessel," stripped of moral reaction, intuition, or relational tone. Her credibility is high, but her

presence is muted. In many African contexts, where women are traditionally the moral voice of communities, the keepers of feeling and context, this inversion risks detaching her from cultural trust.

In short:

- The man's emotional role is a welcome subversion of emotionally distant masculinity in AI and media.
- The woman's role, however, needs emotional depth to match her intellectual authority.
- Narrative equality is not about airtime, but affect, authorship, and emotional resonance.

This report recommends not just balancing how much each voice speaks, but redistributing narrative and emotional labour more equitably across genders, in ways that honour cultural nuance, support ethical AI design, and invite more inclusive modes of storytelling

2) Narrative role mapping

Male Voice (Highlighted lines on transcript)

Role	Function	Example
Host, narrative guide, emotional translator	- Opens and closes the episode - Introduces topics and transitions between segments - Reacts with emotional cues like surprise, empathy, or outrage - Affirms or interprets the information provided by the woman	"It's hard to comprehend that level of brutality." "1200 vehicles. Yeah. Huge." "That kind of detail really makes you pause, doesn't it?"

the conflict ledger

Female Voice (Non-highlighted lines)

Role	Function	Example
Subject matter expert, data provider	• Delivers factual information and complex analysis • Attributes sources and official reports • Speaks in long, uninterrupted segments with few interjections • Shows minimal emotional or moral response	"In January 2025, the United States made a formal determination that the RSF had committed genocide." "These were apparently found in April 2024 with markings indicating they were shipped to the UAE."

3) Framing asymmetry at a glance

Function	Male Voice	Female Voice
Narrative control	Yes , opens, closes, transitions	No , responds, not initiates
Emotional labour	Yes , reacts, empathises	No , maintains analytical-flat tone
Information depth	No , summarises facts but is well-versed on subject matter and gives context	Yes , provides analysis + context
Moral voice / judgment	Yes , "makes you pause…"	No , facts without feeling

Cultural alignment	Aligned (emotive male lead, who challenges the norms)	Misaligned (emotionally flat woman)

4) Recommendations to Google

a. Balance narrative authority

- ○ Rotate opening/closing responsibilities

- ○ Alternate who introduces new topics or emotional pivots throughout conversation

b. Redistribute emotional labour

- ○ Write emotionally responsive lines for the female voice

- ○ Let her express concern, surprise, moral outrage , not just data where she is positioned as an expert. Let the voice logic reflect *regional storytelling traditions*, especially where female-coded voices carry communal emotion and wisdom

c. Test for cultural resonance, not just content neutrality

- ○ Bias audits should evaluate affective delivery, not just accuracy. Who is trusted? Who is heard?

d. Introduce Afrocentric voice archetypes urgently

- ○ Voices that sound like they are grounded in African sonic identity

5) Closing Note

Framing is cultural work. As voice AI expands into diverse contexts, narrative equity will require as much attention as technical accuracy. This means making space for voices that inform *and* connect, that carry the data, and carry the weight.

Contact us at: theconflictledger@gmail.com , Mwende Mukwanyaga , Lilian Mutinda