Decolonizing the Absolute Presuppositions of Humanistic Studies: Towards   Gendering the Humanities

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Abstract

A large proportion of the basic content of the curriculum and method of humanistic studies in Africa originated from the West. It is as such the case that they will serve as conduits for Western mental colonizing and its sexist agenda. This paper argues that decolonizing the absolute presuppositions of humanistic disciplines underpinning the dynamics of exclusion will enhance the needed gendering process. Colonial mentality informs the peculiar way humanistic disciplines look at issues of existence, culture, language, lived experiences and so on. It conditions its reasoning and the conclusions they arrive at which significantly excludes women, especially from meaningful and impactful representation. The paper aims to interrogate through the methods of critical analysis and systemic thinking these absolute presuppositions, introduce a gendering process that displaces entrenched perspectives, content and methods in the humanities that promotes exclusion. The value of this paper is in the examination and connection of mental coloniality with women exclusion in the humanities as well as the combination of decolonization with a gender inclusion project that ensures a holistic and sustainable development of an inclusive humanistic discipline for Africa.

Keywords: Absolute Presuppositions, Decoloniality, Exclusion, Gender, Humanities.

Introduction

To interrogate the problem of exclusion of women in humanistic studies, it is imperative to understand what humanistic disciplines entail, trace the origin of exclusion as well as the contradictions of exclusion. In this paper, I begin with this explanation, as I also uncover some of the plausible reasons why the overriding contents of the curriculum and method of humanistic studies in Africa which originated from the West are enmeshed in colonial mentality and gender bias. I will also examine the absolute presuppositions of humanistic disciplines underpinning the dynamics of exclusion and the established forms through which it manifests, thereby establishing the connection of mental coloniality with women exclusion in the humanities. Gender bias and women exclusion in humanistic studies is a problem because it deprives humanistic studies the essential diverse perspectives needed to enrich and provide a more comprehensive understanding and representation of human experiences; as well

as denying it the basis for critical construction of knowledge. I will interrogate what decolonizing entail and how together with systemic thinking these absolute presuppositions and its manifestations can be displaced. This paper will in the process introduce a gendering process that displaces entrenched perspectives, content and methods in the humanities which promotes exclusion. This will birth a mentally decolonized humanistic studies that captures and brings to the table comprehensive and diverse perspective on culture, its development and significance, as well as language and women's lived experience, necessary for a robust and sustainable knowledge and Africa's development.

Humanities, Humanistic Disciplines and Humanistic Studies in Africa Explained

"Humanities" comes from the Latin word "*humanus*" meaning human, cultured and refined (USF, 2023). It also refers to any system or mode of thought or action in which human interests, values, and dignity are taken to be very important and are expected to be prioritized above all else. Humanism is the aspect of philosophy concerned with emphasizing human welfare and dignity, and is enthusiastic about the powers of human reason and the inevitable need to use reason as best as we can. It was distinctive of the Renaissance period, allied to the renewed study of Greek and Roman literature; rediscovery of the unity of human beings and nature, a renewed celebration of the pleasure of life all supposedly lost in the Medieval world. (Blackburn, 2005: 171).

Humanism, is also a term applied to a variety of beliefs, methods, and philosophies that place central emphasis on the human realm. There are two forms of humanism: religious and secular. Humanism birthed the humanities and informs humanities' disciplines. This connection enhances their mutual enrichment thereby providing a rich context for humanistic inquiry. Humanities expand our knowledge of human cultures and help us understand what binds us together and what differentiates us from one another. Humanities include studying and interpreting languages, literature, history, philosophy, ethics, and arts. It is the exploration of the human mind and its various expressions. (UN Academy, 2023) A humanistic education aims to equip its students with the ability to understand, appreciate, and produce art, music, theatre, and literature (University of Minnesota Morris, 2023). Central to these definitions is the word 'human' who is reasonable and creative. Human ordinarily should refer to female and male beings or men and women of all ages. How then can this basic and

inspiring understanding of human beings have birthed exclusion of one or the dominance of one gender over the other?

With the introduction of university education to students in European colonies and the creation of universities in Africa, humanistic studies can be said to have begun in Africa in the early twentieth century. This seems simply like a domestication of the disciplines within African countries and with this domestication came the values of enlightenment as well as its baggage such as Eurocentric thinking and form of Patriarchy, African traditional cultural values' displacement (known to the colonizer as Cultural Revolution) and a form of African elite cloning. That is, a strategic act of creating a set of educated class with a colonized mind-set who are neither fully African nor English in thinking and in identity.

The essential content of the curriculum, standard and method of humanistic studies in Africa having originated from the West, were strategic in delivering the imperialist mission and vision thereby serving as conduits for its explicit and implicit mental colonizing, sexist and cultural displacement agenda. An example is the Abrahamic religion introduced by the colonialist to a people whose religious and cultural ontological underpinning was complementary of the sexes. Its creation story claimed that women were made for men, to meet their needs, that their error brought about the downfall of mankind and so should be silent in the place of worship and should never aspire to be leaders over men, indeed a patriarchy reinforcing religion. Till date humanistic studies reinforces exclusion and subjugation of women as their perspectives are usually not included in its knowledge production and dissemination.

Presuppositions, Absolute Presupposition and Mental Coloniality

Frege Gottlob describes a presupposition as a condition that must be met for a sentence to have a truth value. In other words, a presupposition is an assumption that is taken for granted when making a statement. A presupposition is an implicit assumption about the world or a background belief relating to an utterance whose truth is taken for granted in discourse. Presuppositions are simply beliefs that everyone has which affect how they think, view the world and interpret evidence. Absolute pre-suppositions are primarily

pre-reflective, pre-interpretive, and pre-cognitive. They precede our intellective awakening and application. They are therefore different from propositions. (Frege, 1982: 152-154; Collingwood, 1988: 18)

According to Collingwood, every cultural epoch has a certain way of looking at things, which conditions its intellectual life and determines the kind of conclusions at which it arrives. This way of looking at things in a series of propositions is called Absolute Presuppositions. It is common to every era and one may be unconscious of them thereby taking them for granted. (Collingwood, as cited by Casserley, 1959:215)

From Collingwood's assertion, one can trace the era of humanistic studies to ascertain the correlation between the era and the prevalent presuppositions of the humanistic studies. The explicit culture of the Renaissance was that of the re-prioritization of the role of reason, the revival and re-elevation of creative ability of human beings. It was an era where the prevalent mode of thought or action in which human interests, values, and dignity are taken to be very important and are expected to be prioritized above all else, and Greek philosophy was revived. Unfortunately, the conclusions arrived at in this period included the promotion of Patriarchy.

Patriarchy can be described as the organization of society in such a manner that men hold dominant power and determine what roles the women can and should play. These are roles beyond the dictates of nature but socially ascribed to women and men and are termed gender roles. Lewis Ellen Dahl from a feminist perspective claims that 'these gender roles evolved over centuries and are now normative behaviours shaped by previous generations. Unfortunately, these norms, now imbedded into almost every organisational and societal institution, were created primarily by white, privileged, educated, men.' (Lewis, 2016:18).

> These men with access to the `public sphere' of society, were freely able to identify, discuss, and create resolutions about societal life's problems, largely without input from women (Brisolara, 2014). These debates and their male-dominated resolutions were then able to shape the political spheres that guided academia, law, government, judiciary and medical institutions, etc. Women, on the other hand, were often relegated to the 'private spheres' of society of family and home life. Consequently,

women's experiences, and what they valued as priorities, were mostly absent (Brisolara et al., 2014).

Renaissance period also extended into the early modern period. Modernism refers to the path of western cultural evolution emerging within the past two millennia rising to the world dominance. It serves as an ideology rationalising the expansion of industrialised capitalism and the displacement of local cultures and therefore alternative paths of Cultural Revolution (Blackburn 2005: 237). Also, Charles Jencks (1991:14) describes modernism as a period when a whole set of assumptions about the way the world works and should be organised was established. It is obvious that the prevailing ideas during the era of modernity also compounded this internal dissonance especially with the influence of Francis Bacon and his likes. Their propositions of logic and binary way of thinking that foregrounds the ideas of 'we' and the 'others', superiority and inferiority, introduced the perspective that man is superior to inferior woman. This shaped their thought processes, language, concepts of persons and social order.

Mental coloniality began during the colonization of traditional African societies and the rebranding of African landscapes, resources, religion, language, cultures and most importantly African minds as needing the superior European conversion, baptism and transfiguration to be authentic as well as fitting into the capitalist and cultural expansion. This strategic capture of the African minds birthed the pseudo-authentic colonial consciousness, thought processes and language template. African traditional worldview gradually seemed ignorant, dark, backward, unappealing and bland to those whose mental palates had been intentionally fine-tuned with European and North American cultural delicacies. Consequently, the rich African language which is the repository and pillar of African culture became undignified vernacular where the Queen's English occupied a place of pride and the only medium of intellectual contemplation. Akinola (2012) opines that given the affinity between language and thought, it easily led to linguistic oppression that fostered male domination and women's subjugation. In the same vein Akiode claims that: The Western philosophic heritage is not only essentially 'male-centric', its contemplation of humanity and 'metaphysical mores' substantially excluded women. In instances where women

were remembered, some referred to women in passing and in condescending manner. Examples include Aristotle's view of women as less rational than men, Kant's claim that women are 'too lazy to dare', an attribute that confines them to a state of immaturity whereby they do not have the civil nature to enable them participate in the public sphere. Machiavelli compare women to fortune who ought to be controlled and ill-treated to enable her smile on the audacious. Unfortunately, African philosophers consciously or unconsciously embraced and aligned with this heritage. (2008:68)

This alignment cuts across all segments of humanistic studies. The ideological offspring of colonial rule includes the domesticity of women, the assigning of decorous roles for women and subsequent confinement to the private space. 'Rooted in colonial prescriptions for 'civilized' and 'feminine' positions for African women, the view that women's legitimate duties were to their immediate families and homes became pervasive' (Musafare, 2007: 27).

Socialist feminism claims that our 'inner lives' as well as our bodies and behaviour are structured by gender. That this gender-structuring is not innate but is socially imposed and they occur when we are very young and is reinforced throughout our lives in a variety of different spheres and that these relatively rigid masculine and feminine character structures are very important in maintaining male dominance (Jaggar, 1983;127). This fed into the existing absolute presuppositions and reinforced them in a way that made it seem normal to practice epistemic exclusion of women, that is, when women's perspectives are excluded from knowledge creation, acquisition and dissemination which also enhances epistemic injustice in humanistic studies.

Presuppositions, Gender Bias and Women Exclusion

Presupposition plays a significant role in shaping and perpetuating gender bias in the humanities. However, gender blind spot which refers to the myth of gender neutrality is a significant cause of the biases in presupposition which extended to the humanities. That is, the supposition that the male gender is sufficient in itself to answer for both itself and the female gender in a manner that subsumes the female under and within the male gender. The implication is that there is no need to differentiate between the male and female persons as

both are represented and their needs and concerns are catered for and covered in every reference to the male gender such as in language use, in thought, planning, practice and other human applications. Or that disciplines in their discourses and references cover for both male and female when they refer to the male gender. This is a myth; all claims of gender neutrality in humanities and other disciplines is problematic as it perpetrates gender bias and exclusion of women and girls' needs, concerns and aspirations. This is because it projects men's perspectives as representative of both men and women's perspective. Therefore, gender neutrality is itself a presupposition that is unreflective of what is morally right and even human reality or the societal ontology.

The link between this presupposition and gender bias can be observed in various aspects, including curriculum development, language use, selection of canonical thinkers in humanities, criteria for knowledge production and dissemination, research, (research methodologies, and interpretations of findings and outputs) and so on.

Language is an extremely important vehicle for communication in the humanities. It conveys thought and meaning with which creative abilities, arguments, ideas are expressed and documented. Unfortunately, some linguistic constructions and expressions presuppose traditional gender roles and reinforce gender stereotypes, thereby contributing to bias. For example, the use of generic 'man' and the masculine pronouns 'he' to refer to both males and females can presuppose male as the default gender, marginalizing or excluding women (Boroditsky, 2010). This linguistic bias can influence the way knowledge is produced, taught, and understood in the humanities. For instance, in his *Politics*, Aristotle claim that a woman's deliberative faculty is "without authority" (akuron) (Pol. 1.13 1260a13). This comment has been interpreted in different ways but its interpretation as meaning that women are incapable of reasoning or rationality is prevalent; and it has influenced the way knowledge was produced such that it could not be contributed to nor taught by women. The language of introspection and moral reasoning has been male-centric. Allison Jaggar criticised the male-centric moral and ethical enterprise of philosophy by explaining why and how males became more dominant and served as the basis

of the moral standards of our society. By showing lack of concern for women's interests and neglecting women's issues; by confining them to a socially isolated domestic realm of society that does not rise to the level of legitimate political regulation; denying the moral agency of women, preferring and prioritizing masculine values over female values and by the devaluation of women's moral experience in favour of male notions of moral rules, judgments about particular actions, impartial moral assessments, and contractual agreements. (Jaggar 1983: 88).

Moreover, presuppositions can shape the research agenda and methodologies employed in the humanities, leading to biased outcomes. Unconscious biases or presuppositions about gender can influence the selection of research topics, the choice of historical figures or authors to study, and the interpretation of their works (Wells, 2020). These implicit biases can result in a limited representation of gender experiences and perspectives, perpetuating existing gender imbalances. For example, in carrying out social researches or planning community projects or programmes, often time gender perspectives and needs are not factored in and when this happens, there will be no way to assess how such projects or programs impact women and men differently, whether or not they contribute to closing existing gender gaps or they exacerbates them, therefore, the benefits become difficult and costly to calculate if not factored in from the inception of the research, project or programme planning.

Also, presuppositions can be tied to dominant narratives or societal norms, which often reflect historical gender imbalances and stereotypes. These narratives can frame certain perspectives, experiences, or contributions as more valuable or legitimate than others, reinforcing gender bias. For example, if the dominant narrative presupposes that men are more intellectually inclined than women, it can lead to the undervaluation or exclusion of women's contributions in humanities disciplines. Also, the domesticity narratives that women are supposed to operate in the private sphere catering to their immediate families and homes, limits women's aspirations. For instance, the perspective that career-oriented women are overstepping their boundaries and so should be grateful for being allowed and accepted in the public sphere and should not

complain about getting low or lower wages and about glass ceiling. To address gender bias in humanities, it is crucial to critically examine and challenge the presuppositions underlying curriculum design, research and teaching practices. By recognizing and questioning these presuppositions, scholars and educators can promote more inclusive and equitable approaches to studying and understanding gender in the humanities.

Evidence of Gender Exclusion in Humanistic Studies

The evidence of gender exclusion in the humanities has been established over time by different scholars especially feminists and are as follows:

1. Underrepresentation of Women in Scholarly Publications: Up until recent times, women were significantly underrepresented in the canon of works and scholarship in various humanistic disciplines. For example, in literature, women writers were often overlooked or dismissed, resulting in a limited number of female-authored texts being included in the literary canon. Similarly, women's contributions in philosophy, art, history, and other humanities fields were frequently overlooked or devalued, leading to a skewed representation of perspectives. Consequently, women receive fewer citations compared to their male counterparts, and which impacted their career progression and recognition. (Larivière, et al. 2013: 211-213) A study by Knobloch-Westerwick, et al, 2013: 603-625) found that articles written by women in communication research were less likely to be published and cited compared to those authored by men. This is because the powers that regulate knowledge production, what is important to invest in its study, knowledge acquisition, evaluation, valuation and dissemination lies mainly in the hands of men with conscious or unconscious bias. It is important to note that for every Angela Roothan, Sophie Oluwole, Oyeronke Oyewunmi, Veli Mitova cited today, there are hundreds of women whose works were overlooked and are still being undervalued.

2. Gender Bias in Curriculum design, Research and its methodology and Teaching: Studies have shown that most curriculum design, research and teaching methodology and styles within humanities disciplines are male-centric. Research articles, textbooks, and syllabi have historically focused predominantly on male scholars and male-authored works, perpetuating a male-centred narrative. This bias has limited the visibility and recognition of women's

intellectual contributions, further marginalizing their perspectives in humanistic study (Kramarae & Spender 2000).

3. Gendered Interpretations and Stereotypes: Feminist scholars have critically analysed the ways in which gender biases influence interpretations and perpetuate stereotypes within humanistic fields. Women's experiences, concerns, and achievements have often been trivialized, reduced, misrepresented or out rightly dismissed as not been logical. Gendered interpretations have reinforced stereotypes, such as the objectification of women in art, the confinement of women to subordinate and domestic roles in literature, or the exclusion of women from philosophical and theoretical frameworks (Bufton & Lutz, 2018:453-479)

4. Institutional Barriers: Women have faced institutional barriers in pursuing careers and advancing in the corporate world including humanities studies. Discriminatory practices such as gender biased mentorship, recommendations, promotion, professional advancement in the workplace, gender-biased hiring and lack of institutional support to sustain continued career progression such as recognition of the need for support through women's lived reality of pregnancy and child nurturing, all of which hinders women's career progress even in humanistic disciplines. Research is required to measure the impact of marital responsibility and lived experience on the career progression of both men and women to fully appreciate the urgent need for gendering the humanistic disciplines.

5. Gendered Disciplinary Divisions: Humanistic disciplines have often been organized around gendered divisions, with certain fields associated more with women (e.g., literature, gender studies) and others with men (e.g., philosophy, history). This division has reinforced gender hierarchies and limited cross-disciplinary collaborations, contributing to the marginalization of women's perspectives in broader humanistic study.

6. Underrepresentation of Women in Academic Leadership: Women are often underrepresented in leadership positions in the public sphere including humanities departments and research institutions, which limits their influence and visibility in shaping the field. Some occupy leadership positions as a form of tokenism and may not have the needed authority to back their positions. This

disparity persists despite women's increasing participation in higher education and their achievements in related disciplines. (Leslie, et al.2015; 151-170)

7. Gender-Based Harassment and Discrimination: Women generally including those in humanities studies are exposed to gender-based harassment, discrimination, and hostile environments, which have had detrimental effects on their academic and professional experiences. Such experiences can deter women from pursuing careers in humanities or lead to their exclusion from certain spaces or opportunities. These evidences highlight the persistent gender exclusion within humanities studies, underscoring the need for an intentional gendering of the humanistic studies in order to create a more equitable and diverse landscape within the humanities and eliminate its internal dissonance.

System Thinking Philosophy and the Humanistic System

In bringing about a gendering process for humanistic studies, I have applied systems thinking to aid the understanding of the problem of internal dissonance within the humanistic studies as well as its exclusion of women, while proposing mental decoloniality as one of the probable means of addressing this problem. The end is to enhance the birth of realistic and sustainable solutions to the problem of women exclusion in the humanities.

Systems thinking is both a philosophy and a strategic approach to solve complex problems. It is an approach to problem-solving that views 'problems' as part of a wider, dynamic system. It is the process of understanding how things influence one another as part of a whole. Systems thinking involves much more than a reaction to present outcomes or events. It demands a deeper understanding of the linkages, relationships, interactions, and behaviours among the elements that characterise the entire system. (Futurelearn, 2023). It is "the ability to collectively analyse complex systems across different domains (society, environment, economy, etc.) and across different scales (local to global), thereby considering cascading effects, inertia, feedback loops and other systemic features" (Wiek et al. 2011:207).

Systems thinking also known as Systems Philosophy begins with the fundamental questions of ontology and epistemology – what is the nature of reality and how do we know, i.e. what is the nature of our knowledge about

reality? Following closely on these first two questions is perhaps more important one: how shall we act? (Hammond, 2005:21) From a systems perspective, then, reality is seen in terms of organization and interdependence, highlighting patterns of relationship between the various parts of a system (Bertalanffy 1952, Hammond, 2005: 22) which is a contrast to the reductionist narrative of the natural science approaches of Descartes and Newton despite its giant technological achievement. It introduced a mechanistic and individualistic perception of reality that stripped humans of ethical qualities, values and relatedness. System theory (science, philosophy and intervention) attempts to recover them by revealing the mutual interrelatedness of reality. "If we can successfully generate and disseminate systems science and systemic intervention practices that are ethically reflective, take account of multiple viewpoints, and are sensitive to the ecology we are a part of, this will be one of the most beautiful gifts we could leave for future generations…No one person can do it alone, but by pooling our talents and insights we have a realistic chance of making it happen" (Midgley, 2003:xlix).

In attempting to answer the episteme-ontological question of reality, I look to the combined understanding of reality summed up as follows: reality unfolds as interdependent, interconnected 'being-with' and causality (*ajowa*); mutual causality or dependent co-arising, resonating in African ontology of being, Buddhist teachings and Systems theory which have profound ontological, epistemological and ethical implications, changing not only one's perception of the external world, but also one's understanding of self (Akiode, 2018, Macy 1991, Hammond). To know this reality is to know how the subsystems within the systems of humanistic studies are all interrelated and interdependent.

This necessitates an understanding of how the different subsystems of humanistic studies interact to enforce and reinforce women exclusion. According to systems thinking, system behaviour results from the effects of reinforcing and balancing processes. A reinforcing process leads to the increase of some system component. If reinforcement is unchecked by a balancing process, it eventually leads to collapse. A balancing process is one that tends to

maintain equilibrium in a particular system. Attention to feedback is an essential component of system thinking.

To apply this to the nature of humanistic disciplines as we know it, it requires having a big picture in view (Leon Ho, 2023) and understanding the importance of existing subsystems and their significant interactions as well as their interconnectedness in the ontological reality of humanistic studies. The big picture here is to have a truly gendered and inclusive humanistic studies in Africa that, emphasizes the importance of listening to women's voices which can influence gender consciousness in the larger society through its disciplines, products and engagement with the 'town'.

So, to what subsystems do we refer? They are the components of the disciplines in humanities in Africa. They are African societies and their colonial heritage, the European origin of humanistic studies in Africa, the African higher institutions, the management team, the employment and promotion board and policies, the curriculum for humanities and their canonical thinkers, the lecturers, the students, the general learning environment and other components that will unfold or evolve with time. To understand how their interaction, interconnectedness and interdependence bring about the systemic problem of women exclusion in the humanistic studies, system thinking proposes two main actions namely-

1. To understand how the system works and the use of feedback points;
2. To discover the events, patterns and structures. (Senge, 2014)

Adopting this systemic thinking process of understanding how the system works and using feedback points and doing so in an ethically reflective manner as suggested by Midgley (2003), I believe is an ever-evolving process and not a once-for-all times- affair. To be able to explain how the system works, is to also discover and interrogate the patterns, events and structures within the humanistic studies. To discover the **events** of humanistic studies is to ask the question- what happened? To discover the **patterns** is to ask the question- what has been happening. To discover the **structures** (visible and non-visible) is to ask the question- what is causing issues?' what are the factors and forces responsible?

These are system thinking perspective of interrogating the subsystems (parts) and systems (whole) of humanistic studies in combination with examining how the system works and using feedback points. The event perspective by asking what happened in and to humanistic studies in Africa, examines the ontological reality of humanities by tracing its origin as a discipline that values human reasoning, values, virtues and dignity and what is prevalent in it till date. Humanistic discipline was born during Renaissance period in Europe and was imported during colonial and early post- colonial period to Africa. The pattern perspective examines what has been happening to and in humanistic studies. Humanistic studies came into Africa with a Eurocentric baggage, within which is the presupposition of gender neutrality and women inferiority, irrationality and subsequent exclusion as stated here: "The absence of women from the canon of international thought is not due to the absence of women in the early interdisciplinary field of IR. It is due to their retrospective removal and exclusion by those seeking to establish a disciplinary canon for IR from the 1950s and those writing IR textbooks in the 1960s and 1970s". (APSR, 2021)

The evidence of gender bias and women exclusion in the humanities have already been discussed. Using the pattern perspective entails further interrogation of the structures that are not easily seen, which require a deeper probing to be able to capture everything that can be captured. Just like the 'iceberg narrative', what lies invisible to the eyes (at the point where the waterline dissects the iceberg) is deeper and weightier than what is visible, and interrogating this provides deeper understanding and clarity; understanding what has been happening in and to humanistic studies requires examining the not so obvious patterns. I have identified suppositions and presuppositions as some of the not so visible underlying factors in humanistic studies that resembles patterns.

The structure perspective asks about the forces or factors causing the issues identified in the humanistic studies in Africa. These are forces or factors that could be enabling the issues or doing otherwise. I have identified patriarchy entrenched in European way of life which was smuggled into Africa during

colonization and subsequently subtly and boldly through its Cultural Revolution agenda which led to a complete colonization of traditional African mind-set.

The examination of how system works and the use of feedbacks encompasses the perspectives of interrogation. The earlier part of this paper has been an attempt to analyse the ontological reality of humanistic studies, by tracing its origins to the Renaissance period and identifying the colonial influence (Eurocentric mind-set and practice) as one of the main reasons for women exclusion in order to examine how the system works. I identified presuppositions born out of gender neutrality and colonial mentality. That is, mental coloniality as the enhancer of women exclusion in African society's socio-political and economic spheres as well as in the humanistic studies. The reality is that these presuppositions and mental coloniality permeated the entire subsystems of humanistic studies in Africa and influenced their interaction and engagements as parts of a whole and as a whole system altogether. For instance, presuppositions of gender neutrality and gender binary of superiority and inferiority were prevalent and infused into the thought, epistemic frameworks and practice of humanistic studies and the socio-political life of the Europeans before they set their foot on African soil for colonization; and when they did colonize, it was with the agenda of Cultural Revolution. The aftermath of this is the transfer of these presuppositions and colonial mind-set into African societies, their religion, socio-cultural practices and their way of life to the extent of altering their identities. Humanistic studies in Africa is not exempt from this transfer, in fact it has helped to concretize it. The use of feedback point is to identify the enablers of gender bias and women exclusion in humanistic studies, to examine the presuppositions that makes is system gender blind and to attempt to unplug them in a bid to make the system truly inclusive and gender aware, to promote its 'flying with both wings' for a more robust and balanced humanistic studies. Feedback point works by identifying a problem, resolving it to examine if the problem have been solved or if still persists and keeps at it till the problem is resolved.

Using the feedback point, I then debunk gender neutrality and attempt mental de-coloniality in a bid to address gender bias and women exclusion in

the humanistic studies. That is, in addressing the internal dissonance of humanistic studies, feedback point focuses on the problem of the subjugation of women's voice and perspectives, by looking to identify the enablers of women's exclusion and tackling them. It also involves observation and impact evaluation to ensure the effectiveness or otherwise of the prescribed mitigation.

Mental Decoloniality, Decolonized Presuppositions as Tool of Gendering Humanities

Decolonizing the absolute presuppositions of humanistic disciplines underpinning the dynamics of exclusion will enhance the needed gendering process. Decoloniality refers to the logic, metaphysics, ontology and matrix of power created by the massive processes and aftermath of colonization and settler-colonialism. This matrix and its lasting effects and structures is called "coloniality."(Urban Dictionary.2013) As a method, it aspires to restore, elevate, renew, rediscover, and acknowledge and validate the multiplicity of lives, lived-experiences, culture and knowledge of indigenous people, people of color, and colonized people as well as to de-center hetero/cis-normativity, gender hierarchies and racial privilege. (William & Mary. 2023). Decoloniality in this sense seeks to eliminate gender bias, women exclusion and subjugation, it aspires that all perspectives be brought on board because they matter especially in the humanities.

It is a school of thought that aims to delink from Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies and ways of being in the world in order to enable other forms of existence on Earth. It denotes ways of thinking, knowing, being, and doing that began with, but also precede, the colonial enterprise and invasion. Mental decoloniality therefore aims to delink from Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies of 'superior' West and the 'others' who are inferior and who they bear the burden to enlighten and civilize. This entails self-rediscovery that leads to the deconstruction of master-servant, superior-inferior, colonizer-colonized narratives. It requires knowing the history (as told and experienced by the Africans) of African traditional societies, promoting African ways of being in the world which is different from that informed by Francis Bacon's binary logic, but which promotes inclusivity and oneness with others, even with nature.

Findings (Akiode, 2018, Oyewumi, 1997) have shown that 'unlike the Euro-American languages, the Yorubas did not have gender specific pronouns such as he/she, her/him. 'Yoruba does not do gender' and is 'not dichotomized into male and female; gender is not in their cultural logic and both male (*okunrin*) and female (*obinrin*) were represented in all occupation' (Oyewumi 1997: 68-71). Pre-colonial realities include the fact that, the benevolent patriarchy in traditional African societies did not deny women epistemic power, meaningful inclusion and representation in the religious, socio-economic and political spheres of the society as there was no such gender classification. African knowledge is based on a worldview (of wholeness, community and harmony which are deeply embedded in cultural values) and a culture that is basically relational (Owusu-Ansah & Miji, 2013:3; Ogbo & Ndubuisi, 2013:2-4). Knowledge production was communal, inclusive and open. There were no male (menfolk) gatekeepers of knowledge shutting out their women. All these changed with the importation of Euro-American patriarchal system with its presupposition of women inferiority, fragility and irrationality of females/women, which informed women exclusion, subjugation and domination during the accident of colonial invasion.

There are several approaches to mental decolonization such as language revitalization, cultural reclamation, challenging systemic racism and discrimination and so on; but in this paper I will focus on the aspects most relevant to the humanities. It begins with the consciousness or an awakening of the African mind to the reality of continued imprisonment in the Eurocentric global prison especially in areas where relevant and viable cultural practises were jettisoned to accommodate Eurocentric worldviews that promotes gender bias in humanistic studies. It calls for a return to African beliefs and practices centred on complementarity and interconnectedness and interdependence of one on the 'other(s)', the beauty and benefits of harmonious communal existence and shared 'locatedness' (*ajowa, ajobi, ajogbe, ajoje*) (Akiode, 2018:60-62). This African ontology established the importance of both genders complementing one another as their difference did not connote superiority or inferiority but a richness of context. This will translate to bringing to bear male and female perspectives in promoting and prioritizing the human, their

rationality, creativity and dignity within humanistic studies as it was intended in the Renaissance concept of *humanus* and humanities. Mental decolonization also entails identifying areas where indigenization of thought processes and language can be embarked upon to foster 'Africanization.' This calls for replacing aspects of Eurocentric worldview that belittles the beautiful reclaimable aspects of the African culture with African dignity reviving narratives. Presuppositions like biases could be conscious or unconscious; it behoves every rational being especially scholars in humanistic disciplines to intentionally interrogate every woman subjugating presuppositions and expunge them consciously and continuously. To bring about truly inclusive humanities, Africans must embark on mental decolonization combined with intentional gendering process which enhances epistemic justice. Bell hooks argues that decolonization is a strategy of resistance, Africans must engage in it as a critical practice (Hooks, 2010: 2512). The same for women, feminists and all gender aware persons. That is, the male-centric led epistemic injustice must be collectively resisted.

Gendering Humanistic Studies: An Ethical Imperative

Advocating for gender parity in humanistic studies is both ethical and a necessity. The third question of episteme-ontology of system thinking and philosophy is 'how should we behave? Monopolizing the power to produce, assess, evaluate and disseminate knowledge so as to exclude women, does not allow for balanced perspectives and is according to Fricker (2007:1) a form of injustice and should be resisted. Inclusion of women's perspective, recognition of their place as partners in knowledge production in humanistic studies aids the preservation of her normative content and values. There must be an open gendered collaboration in humanities' 5-fold knowledge creation, acquisition, evaluation, and regulation and dissemination enterprise. Since knowledge is power and everything, the exclusion of women from jointly deciding and participating in this 5-fold knowledge power management is the root of the problem of women discrimination and subjugation. (Chimakonam, 2018:14). Bertalanffy's 'reverence for the living' best represents the fundamental ethical principles of commitment to the active inclusion of all parts of the system, the humanistic studies system. Ethical considerations raise questions of motivation and purpose, what is knowledge for? What interests does it serve? Does it serve

the interests of humanity? Of all life on earth? Or does it serve the interests of power? Is it even possible to serve the interests of the whole, or are our interests inherently in conflict? Knowledge cannot be separate from praxis, and ethical considerations derive from the foundational assumption of interdependence and the corollary commitment to inclusiveness, co-operation and co-creation. (Hammond, 2005: 25)

The Humanities as one of the 5-fold knowledge enterprise requires a transformation through decolonization and adoption of a system philosophy to begin to include and collaborate with its womenfolk to have the moral standing to continue to be relevant in engaging and solving human issues and problems.

Conclusion

In the agenda and quest to foster gender inclusion, meaningful representation and shared epistemic power in humanistic studies, it is pertinent to interrogate the presuppositions enhancing women's exclusion, embark on mental decolonization combined with a review of relevant indigenous or cultural ideas that promote complementarity of beings. Systemic thinking perspectives enabled a thorough investigation of causal factors that are both visible and non-visible, trends and patterns in a bid to answer the 'episteme-ontological' questions about the humanistic studies in Africa. Presuppositions constitute a major enabler of exclusion, and so should be critically analysed and passed through the crucible of reason so as to incorporate ideas that promote gender equity and inclusion in the humanities. This will foster a truly inclusive humanistic studies in Africa. This will also entail creating awareness about gender blind-spots, deconstructing imported social structures that promote women's exclusion especially from knowledge production and dissemination which promote epistemic injustice in the humanities.

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