

RE-HUMANIZATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF GENDER USING SOCIAL EQUITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES

By

Professor Dorothy Oluwagbemi-Jacob

Department of Philosophy

University of Calabar, Nigeria.

E-mail: doroathyolujacob@unical.edu.ng,

doron32@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper is designed to interrogate the de-humanizing conditions surrounding certain aspects of gender dynamics with a view to employing social equity and human rights principles to re-humanize such. Some principles of social equity such as justice, equality (political, civil and economic) will be used as bases for evaluating and assessing gender relations. In pursuance of this aim, particular attention will be paid to manifestations of gender inequality as these pertain to exclusion of women from decision making, human rights violations, violence against women, and lack of access to productive resources (land). Are there likely challenges to re-humanizing humanity from the perspective of gender using social equity principles? What alternative gender philosophy can be used to construct new gender pedagogy that allows for re-humanization? The paper advocates gender complementarity as opposed to gender dichotomy that allows for de-humanization in the form of violations of human rights and violence against women.

Keywords: re-humanization, gender, social equity, culture, masculinity, femininity, human rights, human dignity, complementarity, empowerment.

Introduction

One's concern with gender dynamics reveals a wide range of issues: what role men and women are expected to play in various societies, how men and women relate in both private and public spheres, perception of self, legal status, socio-economic space, poverty, women in education and development, human rights violations, political and socio-economic rights, justice and equality, respect for human dignity, empowerment and indeed, everything that is life enhancing.

It is fitting to indicate from the start that gender includes both men and women. But there is this tendency to think that it is all about women and this is for good reason. Issues about women subordination, marginalization, discrimination, oppression, suppression and women empowerment appear to dominate the discussion when issues of gender are raised. This is not surprising since the gender relations over the years have been

characterized by inequality. An appraisal of this inequality presents one with a regimen of hindrances, barriers, obstacles and hurdles, which beset the female sex. Tradition, customary and cultural practices, both western and nonwestern perpetuate injustice of assorted kinds against women touching on those elements that make for authentic existence, such as health, education, political liberty, employment and self-respect. Women suffer disproportionately from abuses and denials of basic human rights. They suffer disproportionately from denials and deprivation of economic, educational and political opportunities.

The main objective of this paper is to bring social equity and human rights principles to bear on gender issues that are de-humanizing with a view to re-humanizing them. It is the position of the paper that to achieve the goals of social equity and human rights as these pertain to gender and re-humanization efforts, the prevailing notion of gender that hinges on gender dichotomy needs to be deconstructed and an authentic gender philosophy based on complementarity, inclusiveness and respect for women rights, which are human rights constructed to take its place. To accomplish this objective, this paper is divided into three sections. Section one begins with the problem of definition. This preoccupation with the concept of gender is to give one insight into the operations of the concept. Section two probes the second question, what is meant by social equity and human rights? The main thrust of the paper, which is using social equity and human rights principles to re-humanize from the perspective of gender will be addressed in section three. Also, an attempt is made to articulate what is meant by humanization. This section also embodies an alternative gender philosophy and the conclusion.

Gender: A Conceptual Framework

Conceptually, sex and gender are separate categories of the human condition. Sex is the attribute that characterizes one's biological condition of being a male or female. In respect of this definition, emphasis is placed on differences in chromosomes, anatomy, hormones, reproductive system and other physiological components. Sex is a natural condition because a person is born with it. These attributes of being a male and female are universal and unchanging. For example, a man impregnates but only a woman can bear a child. The Athenian philosopher, Plato alludes to this distinction in his *Republic* (1974) when he says that the only difference between men and women is biological and one of physical function. He aptly captures his position thus, "the female bears and the male begets". Clearly, human beings without ambiguity can be placed in either category, which means that there is no middle course. One is either a male or a female. However, a third gender category has been identified in recent times with the attempt on the part of some to undergo major transgender surgery in order to change their sex from male to female and vice versa.

Gender is the set of socially constructed behavioral and psychological characteristics associated with masculinity and femininity. The term has been used for social

construction of what it means to be a woman, or man as distinct from biological sex of an individual. This distinction has in no small way toned down the problematic notion of biological determinism: the view that women's biological sex determined a specific set of psychological characteristics and social roles. On the contrary, feminists assert that only biological sex is fixed, while psychological and intellectual characteristics are the products of socialization and education.

Masculinity has to do with the appropriate gender behavior, traits and roles for men. In line with this, men are expected to be strong, bold, and assertive, to be the primary wage earner. In contrast, femininity is used to refer to the ideology that dictates appropriate gender behavior for women. Following this, women are trained to be domestic, nurturing, weak, dependent and playing motherly roles and serving the needs of men. Such portraits of manhood and womanhood are found in several literary and philosophical productions.

Simone de Beauvoir's (1955) view that one is not born a woman but one becomes one aptly captures the picture. In her book *The Second Sex*, De Beauvoir raises the question of what it means to be a woman. According to her, the category of womanhood is imposed by civilization and the fundamental social meaning is "other", which is mysterious. She makes the point that the concept of femininity is socially and historically determined. From the existentialist standpoint which affirms that "existence precedes essence", De Beauvoir urges the view that "one is not born a woman, but becomes one."

The implication of the above is that the so-called characteristic attitudes of men and women are acquired, they are cultural; the results of social conditioning. Thus, masculinity and femininity are the effects of historical processes and vary from culture to culture. What is called femininity is really an existential condition in a given culture. It is definitely not grounded either in biology or in a mysterious feminine essence. De Beauvoir maintains that there are no fixed essences, no fixed human nature.

Unlike sex which is ascribed, gender then, is an achieved status because it is learned. According to Ivone Gebara, "gender is a socially learned concept, manifested, institutionalized and transmitted from generation to generation."⁽¹⁾ This requires of individuals to perform their roles, as men and women in conformity with what their culture expects of them. It affects not only the males and females but also the relationships, which they enter into. These conceptions about what are typically feminine or masculine characteristics: abilities and expectations determine how men and women behave in various situations.

In her work, "Psychology constructs the Female", Naomi Weisstern refutes biologically based theories that link sex differences to differences in sex hormones. She makes the point that little is known about innate sex role behaviour and that there is no biologically

natural female or male behaviour. Thus, no immutable differences exist between men and women apart from differences in their genitals (221-222).

Bardwick and Douvan unfold another perspective to gender affirming that the masculine qualities and achievements are esteemed by men and women. Specifically, the culture values masculine productivity more than female productivity. They explain the situation thus: “the essence of the derogation lies in the evolution of the masculine as the yardstick against which everything is measured, since the sexes are different, women are defined as not – men and that means not good, inferior.... Girls envy boys, boys do not envy girls.” (233) Masculine endeavours are rewarded and those males who succeed- who acquire money, power and status, who acquire and produce things, achieve competition are celebrated. But the attributes that are associated with femininity such as the enhancement of and stabilization of relationships, as well as the female creation of life are not as highly esteemed by men and women alike. (234)

Colombo, Robert and Bonnie concur with the above in their view that “what’s defined as women’s work”- nurturing, feeding, caring for family and home- is devalued and pays low wages or none at all. Further, when women enter jobs traditionally held by men, they often encounter discrimination, harassment or “glass ceilings” that limit their advancement.” (411) If femininity is a social construction, then those roles and characteristics attributed to women- which are seen as justification for their inferior social status- are not innate or product of their biology. Gender forms an important basis for appreciating male/female relations in terms of sex roles in power sharing, decision making, division of labour, access to development benefits and control over resources.

In the gender binary opposition articulated by Grace Etche Okereke, everything about the man sums up in power, dominance, vocality and influence. But the opposite qualities are derisively labeled female and looked down upon (63). It paints the picture of the female personality as parading inferiority. Aristotle sums up this in the following terms: “As between male and female, the former is by nature superior and ruler, the latter inferior and subject and this must hold good of mankind in general.” (68)

This assertion of gender inequality manifests in the exclusion of women from a share in political participation. It creates a fertile ground for the violation of women’s rights, which are human rights. It was the basis for sidetracking women into limited opportunities and consigning them to traditional routine roles such as cooking, fetching water and firewood, cleaning and washing, all considered menial.

The ground for this is prepared through the socialization process, which starts from birth. Gender ideas are learned from families, friends, schools, the workplace, religious and cultural institutions, and the media and opinion leaders. The type casting of individuals, role assignment considered appropriate for both sexes and the level of pressure forms part of the socialization process. Most societies share these roles and rights in such a way that they subjugate the female to the males and work to the disadvantage of the female.

Social Equity and Human Rights: Essential Ingredients

This section highlights the essential ingredients of social equity and human rights. In this regard, the principles of social equity and human rights are highlighted. Subsequently, the paper reviews one or two positions on equity and human rights as these pertain to gender.

Equity is founded on the principle that people should be treated as equals. It is driven by the idea that despite individual differences, all people share a common humanity or human dignity and as such all should count in the moral calculus.

In a society that treats all its members as equals, the varied realms of social, economic, political and cultural will work in synergy for the good of all. Distributive justice and equity are closely linked and more often than not the latter is explored through the lens of the former. Distributive justice involves specifying principles or rules according to which the different goods, services, rewards, punishment etc. should be distributed among members of a society.

The essential ingredients of social equity include “fairness” in distribution, equality of opportunity, treating people with equal concern and respect and the notion that alike cases should be treated alike, meaning that people with similar characteristics should be treated in the same way in terms of the benefits enjoyed or the burdens suffered.

In interrogating the principles of equity at a general level, one needs to (1) examine the various things that are distributed within society such as power, honour, knowledge, wealth, work and leisure, as well as more tangible things such as food, shelter, transportation and medical care, (2) highlight the sorts of goods and services that people are said to need. These include shelter, physical security and environment, health care, water and sanitation and nutrition, a basic education and so on. People need these things in order to have a full life.

Meritocracy: Equity requires that positions in society and rewards should be distributed based on people’s merits. This means that someone is required to have acted in a way that elicited some sort of treatment as a response. Under the merit principle of justice, a person may receive a favourable or unfavourable treatment depending on what the person has done. What the person deserves therefore, is a function of the actions or performances for which the individual is responsible. Practically, people applying for positions should be judged fairly according to their qualifications for the position. This principle is violated where factors such as family background, race or place of origin give people access to different types of job. Or where males and females are treated differently in consideration for a job or paid differently for performing similar tasks. Or where a person’s social standing or political power is more operative in the sorts of opportunity available than their qualifications for the post (Gerber 8)

The initial elements of social equity include justice, fairness and equality. The issue under consideration does not only belong to lawmakers. It is an issue in the family, public administration and other segments of the society that deal with service delivery. In the area of public administration, the emphasis is on issues of race and gender in employment, democratic participation, and service delivery. Clearly, as this pertains to gender relations, there are certain practices that result to obvious unfairness and injustice.

The core concept of justice is equality. From the perspective of equality, justice demands that the same amount of whatever we are sharing should be given to everyone if there is nothing relevant that distinguishes the possible recipients. There is an intimate relationship between equality and fairness. One's concern about equality in this paper has to do with comparative fairness that focuses on how women fair relative to men. Here unfairness consists in women being worse-off than men.

A little detail will give us insight into what equality means in concrete terms. When the concept of equality is examined in the social sphere, one is concerned with the extent to which its ideals are translated into practice in the laws and institutions of society. Equality has a variety of forms in the social sphere: civil equality, political equality and economic equality.

Civil equality is usually apprehended as equality before the law. This requires of society to ensure that all citizens enjoy the same status in the sphere of private law. Thus, when the constitution of a state recognizes civil equality, the citizens are treated alike with respect to the control that may be legitimately exercised over them and the measure of protection they as a matter of right may demand at the hands of their Government. For instance, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, section 18 (1) states: "Every citizen shall have equality of rights, obligations and opportunities before the law." This means that there should be no discrimination in the treatment of individuals except circumstances dictate otherwise. In other words, there should be rational justification for any discrimination in favour of or against the individual.

Political equality is measured in terms of citizen's participation in their government, the extent to which decisions and policies reflect the popular will. It manifests concretely in the conferment on all adult citizens the right to vote, the right to stand as a candidate for election. It also means that individuals who legitimately win in elections should not be denied the right to execute their legislative or executive functions on the grounds of ethnic or regional alignment or sex.

But the enjoyment of political equality may not make real sense in an atmosphere of socio-economic disabilities. Hence, the need for economic equality, which consists in the provisions of adequate wages and so on. This hinges on minimal equality, not strict equality since it allows differences of income and this may be justified in terms of merit or deserts.

Social equity standards require the combination of political and socio-economic justice as articulated above. These standards apply to our personal and social relationships with other individuals and/or groups and embody a bundle of rights and duties, which apply to such in society.

Following the foregoing, social equity is really nothing more than rectifying injustice and doing justice to our fellow human beings who have suffered injuries at present or in the past as a result of their circumstances. These injuries may take the form of harassment or discrimination which has caused the victim to suffer a loss of the equal rights and opportunities that enhance one's wellbeing. As injustice has a dehumanizing effect, social equity is the means used to restore the humanity balance of the victims and redress the injuries caused. In the case of gender, one begins to talk about affirmative action. (<http://www.ship.edu/social-Equity/What-is-Social-Equity>. Downloaded 13th June 2016).

In the absence of social equity, gender inequality is ubiquitous. This is followed by other forms of democratic privation including highly unequal voice in political affairs and government processes that pander more to the privileged than to other gender. ([http://www.socialequity.unimelb.edu.au/what-is-social equity/ downloaded 13/6/16](http://www.socialequity.unimelb.edu.au/what-is-social-equity/downloaded%2013/6/16)).

Social policy objectives bordering on social equity are guided by human rights. Rights refer to the legal, social or ethical principles of freedom or entitlement (Alade 13). It is a just claim or title whether prescriptive or moral and legally binding (Ayn Rand quoted by Alade 13-14). Diversity of things is claimed as human rights. These include *inter alia* right to life, a right to choose, rights of free expression, right to property, and right to liberty. Social policy objectives call for integration of equality of opportunity and its concomitant values, such as non discrimination, recognizing the differential needs of women, men, girls and boys, and the elimination of violence. Social equity provides a framework for removing the barriers erected by society and setting up machinery for full participation and humanization.

Thus, in her paper, *Education and Gender Equity in Africa: the Case of Ethiopia*, Gennet Zewide observes that gender disparity is the most glaring challenge facing the education sector in many African countries. She identifies the internal and external forces which are at work to reinforce gender disparity in education as the gender concept and attitude towards women. These forces predominate vocational and academic institutions in such a way that they prevent female students from taking full advantage of their right for free access to and benefits from education and training. She further observes that the constitutional or legal provisions may entitle equal rights for both sexes in the education sphere, but beyond this, concrete measures are rarely taken to ease the special problems of women in order for them to be able to realize their potential in taking advantage of education and training opportunities. (downloaded Fri. 05 august, 2016, <http://about.jstor.org/terms>, 111).

In her paper, “Addressing social Exclusion: Analyses from south Asia and southern Africa”, Heidi Barth Johnston observes that the health inequities within and between countries have been recognized as unfair and avoidable. She concurs with the Social Exclusion Knowledge Network (SEKN) that many policies and actions focus on the groups who are defined as being disadvantaged, marginalized or excluded from mainstream society but very few policies and actions focus on changing the processes that cause or perpetuate the disadvantage, marginalization or exclusion. This shortcoming is what re-humanizing efforts from the perspective of gender using social equity and human rights principles are aimed at overcoming.

Social Equity, Human Rights and Re-humanization

This section highlights the thematic issues regarding gender that call for re-humanization efforts using social equity and human rights principles. It will be clear that gender relations have existed more in the breach than in adherence to humane values. The paper also highlights the challenges one may encounter attempting to re-humanize. To begin with, it is worthwhile to bring to the fore the reasons why there should be re-humanization using social equity and human rights parameters:

1. Equity is something valuable, good and right in itself. It is desirable and proceeds from people’s common humanity.
2. Gender – based discrimination and gender inequality are ubiquitous and involves severe human rights violations. Promoting social equity principles and employing them in re-humanizing efforts will involve adhering to existing human rights instruments and commitments to agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action.
3. Addressing the root causes of discrimination against women and girls, to overcome structural impediments and empowering them is a universal priority.

To humanize means (1) make something more humane or civilized, (2) give (something) a human character. As Collins English dictionary puts it, if you humanize a situation or condition, you improve it by changing it in a way. To humanize is to make things more humane and easier for humans to relate and appreciate. It implies pre-occupation with human welfare and considerations of human wellbeing. Anything that brings about dignity, respect, contentment, prosperity and joy to human beings is humanizing.

Humanity is denied where the powerful lord it over the helpless, poor, voiceless majority. Humanity is denied, lost or affected where women are oppressed, subordinated and discriminated against by institutions of society, where their human rights are systematically violated, where they are objects of human trafficking and forced prostitution and where they are systematically raped as weapons of war. Specifically, anything that subjects women to abject deprivation and attacks their natural and

fundamental human rights is dehumanizing. These dehumanizing variables are rooted in the numerous cultural practices found across the length and breadth of Africa and beyond. These include deprivation of inheritance rights, oppression of women, sexual harassment and genital mutilations, rape, violence against women in conflict and post conflict situations, cultural practices relating to treatment of widows, i.e. widow torture and inheritance related violence, forced marriages and abortions and political subjugation etc. (Alade 1).

International efforts aimed at improving the lot of women globally are pointers to the fact that the dehumanization of women is real. On September 4th to 5th 1995, delegates from 180 countries gathered in Beijing, the capital of China for the fourth world conference on women to deliberate on gender issues and to advocate for a better deal for the female sex. Also, the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against women (CEDAW), proceeds from the assumption that all practices that harm women, no matter how deeply they are embedded in culture, must be eradicated. Such activities are quite plenty to say the least. "CEDAW calls on governments to work toward transforming not only law, but also culture to achieve gender equity". African Charter on Human and Enforcement Act (CAP 49 LFN 2004) forbids discrimination on grounds of sex and advocates equality before the law.

Some countries have signed and committed themselves to implement these provisions while in others; there are still gaps between theory and practice. All these are pointers to the fact that gender relations in time past and even in recent times have not been characterized by justice, equity, and human rights. Such violations of justice principles, equity and human rights have led to the dehumanization of women to say the least. By their stipulations, women are guaranteed the right to dignity, the right to life, integrity and security, freedom from harmful practices, which negatively affect their human rights (Alade 2)

Subsequently, this paper examines some of the thematic gender issues that call for re-humanization using the principles of social equity and human rights.

1. Exclusion of women from Political participation

In every political administration based on equality there is room for all and sundry to participate fully in taking decisions. In other words, everybody is carried along in the deliberations on matters of common interest. Such a system encourages political justice, which is shown in the participation of the individual in the government of his community.

Ayodele Samuel Jegede has identified four levels of political participation namely:

1. The politically apathetic who are unaware literally of the political world around them.

2. Those involved in 'spectator activities', which include voting and taking part in discussion about politics.
3. Those involved in 'transitional activities', activities which include attending a political meeting or making a financial contribution to a political party.
4. Those who enter the political arena and participate in 'gladiatorial activities' such as standing for and holding public and party offices. (97-98)

Given these four levels of participation, it can be said that the right to vote and be voted for is not synonymous with political equality. Even at that, the right to vote and be voted for was denied women at some point in the political history of many nations including Nigeria. Specifically, before the 1950's, women in Nigeria had no right to vote or to be voted for. It was not until 1893 that women's suffrage was achieved in New Zealand, the very first in the West. Women in Greece and Swiss gained their rights to vote in 1952 and 1971 respectively. There are still countries that deny women the right of citizenship.

The degree of equality or inequality can actually be measured at the level of gladiatorial activities. This is where women's marginalization is clearly evident. For instance, looking at the political landscape of Nigeria as of September, 1992, one would see that democracy had a man's face not a human face. Women folk had an insignificant representation in it. Of the 30 civilian governors, none was a woman. Of the 589 members of the House of Representatives, half a dozen were women (Oluwadiya 112). The picture has not changed tremendously as of 2016, 24 years later. In the current Republic (4th), there are only eight women senators in a senate of 109 members and only 19 women (Effah-Attoe (69-70) in the house of 360 members and not even one female governor in a federation of 36 states. This level of participation is attributed to women's low status. Thus, larger gender gaps still persist in political participation, both for women's representation in political bodies and as voters.

In view of the foregoing, social equity and human rights principle of promoting equal participation and leadership and targeted measure to ensure women's equal rights, access and equal opportunities for participation and leadership in all spheres of decision making is essential. The existing relationship and structure of power and politics account for the inequality in gender relations. These relationships work to the disadvantage of women. To promote equity and humanize the political landscape to accommodate the women folk in this respect, societies must deal with relationships of unequal power. One way to achieve this is by strengthening and empowering actors in the political sphere: empowering the disadvantaged (women) to participate in decision making. Participation in development programming is important. It is important also to strengthen organizations that represent women.

2. Violation of Women's rights

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in brotherhood.” (Breakthrough 18). What is today known as modern day slavery includes women who had been trafficked and forced into prostitution. For instance, “when a fire broke out in a brothel on Phuket Island, a resort in southern Thailand, five prostitutes burned to death. Why? This was because their owners had chained them to their beds to keep them from escaping their bondage.” (Awake magazine, March 2000). In war torn countries such as Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leon and Democratic Republic of Congo, rape has been used as a weapon of warfare against women. Forced prostitution, forced marriages, forced labour, abductions and trafficking are attacks unleashed disproportionately against women and women are exposed to them more than men.

Also, breast ironing, a violent practice that is forced upon young girls who have just entered puberty is a violation of universal human rights committed against the girl child, abusing their physical, sexual and psychological integrity. The breast ironing practice is a procedure in which a hot stone is used to massage across the girl child's breast to break the tissue and stop its growth. According to the perpetrators, the practice is used to avoid unwanted male attention, sexual harassment and rape. This is a crime relating to gender based violence. Medical experts assert that the practice could have serious health implications including infections, inability to breastfeed, deformities and breast cancer. (www.omicsonline.org).

Further, the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) involves violation of rights of the children and a violation of a person's right to health, security, and physical integrity, the right to be free from torture and cruelty, inhuman or degrading treatment, and the right to life when the procedure results in death (Alade 136). Such violations of women's rights occur in various forms in other places. According even little boys more human recognition than grown up women and being sexually violated by male relatives of their deceased husband, supposedly as part of funeral rites in some localities and forcing them to drink “mmiri ozu”, that is water used for washing the corpse to prove their innocence of their husband's death, are clear violations of women rights, which are human rights (Uchem 37). If all these are not de-humanizing, one wonders what can be.

Humanizing efforts employing social equity and human rights principles in this regard require legal actions to checkmate these repugnant customary practices, healthcare professional organizations campaigns aimed at sensitizing and raising awareness on the dangers and undesirability of these harmful practices and also giving succour to the victims.

3. Property Inheritance

Women are denied access to the most important means of production, specifically, land. In many cultures, a woman's access to land usually hinges on her relationship to a man (father, brother, husband, son). Jegede has noted in this connection that "tradition has elevated men above women and in fact women themselves are regarded as property that needs to be shared at the demise of their husbands, thus the system of widow inheritance" (101). This economically disempowers a great majority of women and creates dependence and gender inequality that increases the women's vulnerability to abuse in their homes.

Access to productive assets is central to re-humanization using social equity and human rights tools and land reform is key. Land is a crucial asset on which many people (particularly in rural areas) depend for their sustenance. To make this effective, complementary training and credit should be provided. Beyond this, enacting and enforcing laws, regulations and policies that prohibit all forms of discrimination against women and girls, in particular concerning access to land and property rights, as well as ensuring equal access to justice is a prerequisite to achieve re-humanization of women and girls.

4. Violence against Women

Violence against women is another area where the de-humanization of women is evident. The UN General Assembly resolution 48/104, defines violence against women as "any act of gender based violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately... it includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty." It takes a variety of forms namely, domestic violence, which includes wife battery, economic deprivations, (denial of access to resources or money), restraint from normal activities or freedom, sexual coercion or assault, threats to kill or harm, physical intimidation and attacks. Such conducts disproportionately affect women and cause harm to the safety, health or wellbeing of women (UN General Assembly Resolution, 48/147). Another form it takes is sex selection aimed at eliminating female fetuses, killing women in the name of honour. All these are directed against women because they are women.

To end violence against women and girls and thus promote social equity and human rights principles that aid humanization, challenging root causes such as gender stereotypes and discriminatory social norms and attitudes, comprehensive support services, as well as access to justice and ending impunity are critical.

In addition, Women need to gain the full access to opportunities to generate income, have access to decent and quality employment, including entrepreneurship, access to land tenure rights, access and control of productive assets and income, financial and natural resources, as well as social protection. Moreover, access to quality education at

all levels, life-long learning opportunities for women and girls must be ensured. This will address poverty and the women vulnerability arising there from. Other social equity and human measures that can be taken include:

1. **Challenging embedded power imbalances.** Tackling equity in gender relations will involve challenging prevailing beliefs and misconceptions around gender and to encourage public debate on practical issues of distributive justice and human rights. Equity considerations by definition seek to work against existing power imbalances, which will always be an uphill struggle (Jones 1).
2. **Targeted Action.** This requires tipping the playing field in favour of the disadvantaged (in this context, women) to help even things out. Policies that target group inequalities using subsidies and quotas are often referred to as affirmative action. They provide a 'bias in favour of certain groups (in this context, women).
3. **By addressing the collective struggle of women against the relationship of domination, exploitation and marginalization.** Empowerment approaches that emphasize the importance of increasing self-confidence and awareness of rights and opportunities, as well as building skills and control over resources should be explored. This is what Paulo Freire refers to consciousness raising in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.
4. **Constructing an authentic Gender Philosophy.** Re-humanizing efforts using social equity and human rights principles will require a new gender pedagogy, which includes partnership, complementarity, as well as the idea of missing links in gender relations. The idea of missing links underscores the importance of mutual respect, complementary relationship, cooperation and integration.
5. **Adherence to human rights provisions.** Consistent with re-humanization and social equity is the respect for human dignity, specifically that of women. In the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human rights (1948), there is an emphatic recognition of human dignity as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. Human dignity is a quality possessed by human beings in virtue of their humanity. It is the basis of all human rights and independent of the 'other's purposes, inclinations, idiosyncrasies or expectations. It is not conferred or created by human choices, individual or collective. The reason why one should respect people's autonomy, treat people with equity is because of their dignity. Immanuel Kant sees dignity as intrinsic to the human person and urges one not to treat another as a means but rather as an end. What this reduces to is that each is entitled to the same concern, respect and protection accorded to any other.

The implication of the foregoing is that gender dichotomy that thrives on discrimination, marginalization, subordination and drives the female folk to the backstage where she is

denied, deprived, made a victim of sexual violence, and weighed down by other assorted cultural practices that are not life enhancing amount to gross violations of human dignity.

In view of the foregoing, any attempt at re-humanization engaging social equity and human rights principles must adopt the method of reflection and action. It needs to reflect upon the social contexts and ideologies that have over the years been enthroned to pressure men and disadvantage women. Beyond reflection, such needs to take action by deconstructing the prevailing gender notions that tend to be sexist and constructing new gender pedagogy aimed at sensitizing, educating men and women alike on the sanctity of human dignity and ensuing rights of individuals. This should be made part of civic education that should start from cradle. Scholars in the Humanities, Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs), Civil Society organizations (CSOs) and the media have a significant role to play in this regard. Literary productions with positive portraits of women should be encouraged. Films, plays, home videos and television shows can also play a vital role regarding conscientization and consciousness raising. Home videos such as Nollywood, Bollywood, or Gollywood should portray positive gender relationships that send clear messages about equity and human rights demands of justice and fairness. Fairness embedded in gender equity demands that benefits and opportunities should be given to all be they female or male and that both should be given equal opportunity to participate in all aspects of social life. This is the idea behind gender mainstreaming.

Challenges to Humanization, Social Equity and Human Rights

The challenges and obstacles that confront implementing pro – humanization, pro-equity and pro- human rights policies include (1) the power structures involved (2) the politics surrounding inequity and the complexity of diagnosing and achieving equity and the interplay of cultural factors.

1. **Power.** Power dynamics can result in political resistance to change because those controlling policies often benefit from inequitable institutions and will not want to give up their privileges.
2. **Cultural Factors.** Cultural barriers bordering on the construction of masculinity and femininity are antithetical to equity and human rights. The cultural diehards and those who see themselves as custodians of traditions more often than not resist moves to turn situations around in favour of equity and human rights. Reconstructions of masculinity and femininity that are life enhancing may tantamount to challenging commonly held beliefs, which the so called custodians of culture and traditions may oppose.

In exploring the above, one should not ignore the negative impact that gender inequality can have on men as well. For example, societal norms regarding appropriate behavior for men tend to put them under pressure as regards the need to provide materially for their family, and also deny them opportunities of being nurturing where they ought to be so. Therefore, gender is the concern of all and changes must be brought about for both men

and women. This is not to say that men and women are equally affected by gender inequality. It remains true that women have greater share of disadvantages and so re-humanization is a welcome idea.

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine re-humanization from the perspective of gender relations using social equity and human rights principles. To achieve the main objective of this paper, an effort was made to interrogate both concepts of gender, social equity and human rights for understanding and insight. Having exposed some of the contradictions thrown up by gender dichotomy, the paper brought social equity principles and human rights to bear on the prevailing issues of exclusion from political participation and decision making, violation of women's rights, which are human rights, violence against women, and denial of property rights/access to productive resources. It also articulated a new perspective on gender that is inclusive, complementary and consistent with social equity principles of equality, fairness, non-discrimination and human rights. It was also shown that partnership; integration, complementarity, mutual respect and an appeal to our common humanity and interdependency should be essential features of gender and social equity. It is clear from one's interrogation of gender, social equity and human rights that prevailing conditions of gender fall short of the standards of social equity and human rights principles. Following this, the paper advocated for re-humanization of the situation using social equity and human rights principles as tools. In summary, this paper therefore, submits that re-humanizing gendered situation with its attendant contradictions of denials, deprivations, and violence against women ought to:

1. Recognize women's rights as human rights.
2. Create equal opportunities for both men and women to realize their potentials.
3. Promote inclusiveness in political decision-making rather than exclusiveness.
4. Encourage partnership.
5. Eliminate sexism in policy making issues.
6. Eliminate violence against women.
7. Focus on the humanity of women and not on their biological sex.
8. De-emphasize elevation of the male gender as superior while denigrating the female gender as inferior.
9. Stop the relegation of women to the margins of society but give them a voice in social, political, economic and religious terms.
10. Promote the education and empowerment of women.

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